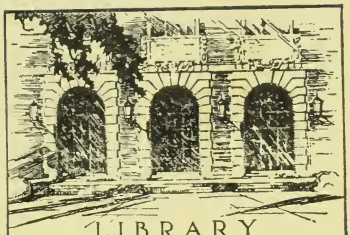
MR NOBODY

MRS JOHN KENT SPENDER



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MR. NOBODY.

VOL. III.

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MR. NOBODY

BY

MRS. JOHN KENT SPENDER

AUTHOR OF

"GODWYN'S ORDEAL," "BOTH IN THE WRONG,"
"HER OWN FAULT," "PARTED LIVES,"

ETC., ETC.

"It is amazing how small a beam of light redeems a soul from the condemnation of utter darkness."

HARTLEY COLERIDGE.

"All things tend upwardly, though weak
Like plants in mines which never saw the sun,
But dream of him, and guess where he may be,
And do their best to climb and get to him—
All this I knew not, and I failed."

ROBERT BROWNING.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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PART VI.

(CONTINUED.)

Oh, my heart is sick a-wishing and a-waiting,
The lad took up his knapsack, he went, he went his way ;
And I looked on for his coming, as a prisoner through the grating
Looks, and longs, and looks, and wishes for the opening day.

JEAN INGELOW.

MR. NOBODY.

CHAPTER II.

Amongst all the friends whom Godfrey had formed during his public school and university life, there was but one who was determined to set his own resolution counter to that of the man who seemed, for some inconceivable reason, unwilling to keep up even a corresponding acquaintance.

The Hon. Charles Lloyd could bear any amount of snubbing, partly perhaps because, owing to his pleasant geniality and the circumstances of his birth, he had never really encountered it in its grosser form. He had three

reasons for wishing to renew the friendship. First, he was curious on account of the air of mystery which it seemed to him Sellwood kept up about his belongings; secondly, he had a high opinion of Sellwood's capabilities, and thought it quite possible that some time or other in his life these talents might prove useful to himself; whilst thirdly, and not least, he had really an affection for the man. Armed with this triple reason, he determined to procure an invitation from some one residing in Godfrey Sellwood's neighbourhood. Fortune favoured him. He made the acquaintance of Mrs. Austin at a fashionable watering-place, and promised to come and stay at a Torringmoor hotel in the month of September, to be near the widow lady, and to be introduced to some of her friends. If Mrs. Austin, who was his match in shrewdness, had her own surmises on the subject, it was to her credit that, as usual, she prided herself on entirely refraining from gossip.

Charlie had lost his time, as he speedily saw, with regard to the main object of his visit. All

he could understand was that there had been some quarrel between the Sellwoods, and, though he was too much of a man of the world to suppose that his old friend would remain in hiding, it was somewhat vexatious to be unable to gratify his curiosity respecting Reuben, who now refused himself to visitors.

There was but one set-off to this disappointment, and, faithful to his character of making the best of everything, Mr. Lloyd speedily forgot Godfrey in this compensation of Fortune. Mrs. Austin had introduced him to Miss Rashleigh, and Charlie was fascinated. Her colouring, he declared, was that of a perfect Hebe, if the expression of her face had not been too subdued for that goddess. He was ready to speculate with all his usual enthusiasm as to the untoward causes which had condemned so resplendent a woman into such a gloomy corner of life.

September had set-in with splendid weather. The farmers' carts were busy loading from morning to night, and though the wheat was much damaged, still the barley was pronounced

well, and it was prophesied that there would be a plenty of sweet aftermath for sheep and cattle. Vere, ever interested in the prospects of the poor, was flitting about like another Ruth, helping the women to glean for as many hours as she could spare in the day. It enabled her to forget her own misfortunes for a time. And when Charlie saw her, and followed her into the fields—full of that little chaffing small-talk which he had found to be peculiarly successful in flirtations—he was annoyed by the dreamy look of absence in her face, as if she were only half with him in spirit. He had come in contact with so many other girls who had looked upon him as a 'possible divinity,' that he was a little disconcerted at this new experience of a young woman whose wits seemed to be wool-gathering, and who did not pay any particular attention to his remarks.

Vere, who had been so often full of life and spirits, tried to seem joyous still to others; and though there was sometimes a drooping of those spirits now—a sinking down to semi-despair when she was alone—it was evident

that she strove with all her heart to bring her thoughts back from some far-off region, and to answer Charlie in the mood in which he would have liked to be answered.

Otherwise he was conscious of making no progress. She did not recognise the flattery of herself; she was untrained in these things, refreshing and unlike most of her sex. And, if she every now and then answered him with a mild sarcasm which gave him the sensation of being mentally rubbed, it was not—as he supposed—because she had been trained in that subtle school of society which makes so many women skilful actresses, but because she had a habit of speaking out her thoughts.

'I am getting the worst of it,' he said to himself one day, when he had hazarded what he had supposed to be a neatly-turned compliment about the unkindness of keeping her hidden from the world 'like another Danæ in a tower,' and when she faced round upon him and answered, with a flush on her cheek,

'I am sure you do not mean to reflect on my uncle.'

'Oh! no, of course not,' he answered, a little startled, as she continued,

'I beg your pardon, but here, in this gossiping place, they have got into the way of saying ugly things against people. Now, there is Mr. Sellwood——'

'Sellwood *père?*' he interrupted. 'Oh! they say ugly things against him, I know. Now I should fancy *he* deserved them?'

'Do they? Oh, dear, I should feel as if it were almost as treacherous of me to allow a word said against him as against my own relations.'

She spoke as if she were speaking to herself; but her fair face was puckered with trouble.

The amused smile with which he had been listening to her changed to something more serious. She was inadvertently throwing some light on a little of the gossip which he had overheard.

'Ah! yes,' he said to himself. 'If Godfrey Sellwood has taken a fancy to her, they are just the two to get on together.'

'You *mean*——?' he began, tentatively; but

there was something in his tone which set her immediately on her guard. And with an effort to disguise her depression, and to look at life in its common-place aspect, she answered,

'I mean nothing at all. They say all sorts of things about Mr. Sellwood's past life; but I know absolutely nothing. It is all a puzzle.'

'Ah! and the most miserable common-places are the enigmas of life. Why, in the world, should we torture our brains over the riddles, whilst others never lose appetite or an hour's sleep in consequence of them?' asked the glib Charlie.

'Why, indeed?' she answered, taking his cue, as she handed a bundle of gleanings, with which he had positively been helping her, to a little, smiling village child. 'I really can't afford to spend my time in speculating and discussing them, any more than I have time to deplore being shut up like a Danæ because my uncle is not rich enough to go to town.'

'No,' she thought, as she forced herself to hum a tune on her way home. '*Here* at least I can make a few people happy, whilst a

thoughtless life spent in gaiety—in a round of constant dressing, eating, and sleeping—would not help me to get rid of the inevitable.'

Mrs. Austin gave another garden-party in that September. It was one of those calm, ominous days which sometimes precede a midnight storm. The corn had been sheaved: there was no longer any reapers in the field, and a sort of Sabbath hush seemed to have fallen on the day. The garden was as unstirred by wind as if the leaves of the trees had been cut out of paper and exhibited by artificial light, like the skilful imitation sometimes seen on the boards of a theatre. Only by the twitter of a swallow preparing for its flight, and the smell of upturned earth, might one realise the scene.

'Are you going out? It is too hot. Surely these errands of mercy might wait,' Vere's uncle had said in the morning. But in the afternoon he had put no such restriction on her liberty. Young Lloyd seemed to be giving every possible guarantee of his devotion. And, though Charlie Lloyd was not rich, his elder

brother was said to be in delicate health, and he might possibly come into the title.

And even if not? The lilies and roses would soon fade on Vere's young cheek; her eyes would soon lose their brightness. Sir Ralph's own health was growing still more weak, and, if the place which belonged to his ancestors was to revert to Reuben Sellwood, it would be best not to leave poor Sir Richard's child in the world without some natural protector.

Mrs. Austin had undertaken to see to Vere's toilet that afternoon. As usual, it was not expensive. But few could carry off a plain, closely-fitting white cashmere dress better than this fresh-looking, country-bred girl. She wore a wide-brimmed hat, trimmed by her own hands with daisies, and beneath its shade the eyes —so strangely of the same colour as Godfrey's, although of a deeper tint—seemed only to have gained a greater intensity by the anxiety which she had to bear.

Mrs. Austin tapped her playfully on the cheek, and whispered,

'You are looking lovely, child. The London ladies with their cosmetiques may well envy you your clear skin and that charming pink.'

'And yet,' the far-seeing matron thought to herself, as she watched Vere at a little distance, with the curly light hair wound becomingly into a knot, and the pretty girlish dignity shown in her unconsciously graceful attitudes, 'yet, though she has all the signs of pure breeding from the neat little head to the pretty toes of her rosetted shoes, it is as the baronet says, the "beauty is but skin-deep." The features are not sufficiently regular to carry her through to my age.'

It may be supposed that Charlie Lloyd did not look on so far. For as Vere stood in the doorway of the ivy-decked drawing-room—where the young people were to dance that autumnal night—divested of her hat, with her mother's jewels flashing on her neck, and the train of her simple dress falling back in shadowy folds, she looked to him a perfect picture framed by a becoming background. She did not see

him at first when he came up to her. For another figure had risen unbidden before her, and she tried in vain to dismiss it from her imagination. Where was Godfrey that night? Were his surroundings miserable? It was a strange freak for her fancy to play her. She had dismissed the man of her own free will. Was his shadow to be always haunting her?

It did not escape Mr. Lloyd's notice that, when he addressed her, she started as if from a reverie, and shivered as if a ghost-like memory had passed over her.

'Of what were you thinking?' he asked, ironically.

'I shall startle you if I tell you,' she answered, unexpectedly.

He smiled in rather a superior way, and shook his head.

'I have lived too long in this world to be startled at anything.'

'I was thinking,' she said, slowly, 'of an act of ridiculous pride which I shall always associate with this room. I did not mean to do harm; but it seems impossible to tell at present

what evil consequences may result from that foolish act.'

'Oh!' he said, beneath his breath. And then—as if guessing the reason of her confidence, and startled by the bitter dejection which was revealed to him—he added, 'I can hear nothing from any of the Torringmoor people of my old friend Mr. Sellwood.'

'No, and something tells me we shall never hear anything but bad news.'

'That is superstitious,' he answered, 'and yet, I confess, I am a little anxious. He had no idea of taking care of himself, brought up in that way.'

'I have sometimes thought,' she said, hurriedly, 'that we may hear of his death, and then I have dismissed the horrible thought as impossible.'

Charlie Lloyd did not answer, even when she added, beneath her breath,

'I could fancy him dying in London and making no sign.'

'He is just the fellow to do it,' he thought within himself; then, aloud, he said, turning

quickly to her, and noticing that she was strangely pale,

'There is really no occasion for you to distress yourself. I mean to advertise.'

'There is that clever Miss Rashleigh at her deep games again,' said a lady who came into the room at that minute, and glanced meaningly at Vere. She smiled a sarcastic smile, and, if Miss Rashleigh had not been a baronet's niece, it is possible she would have passed her without any notice. She looked upon cleverness as an infectious disease, which, owing to her careful bringing-up, it was fortunate *her* daughters had escaped.

Vere noticed the sarcastic bow. It rallied her to the consciousness that her head was swimming, and that she did not want to make an exhibition of herself. An impulse to get help made her lay her hand lightly on Charlie's arm.

'I don't want to dance any more; the waltzes make me giddy to-night. Take me out into the moonlight, into the greenhouse—where I can get away from them all,' she said, in a manner which made him understand, as he had

never understood before, why she had always controlled signs of agitation, and yet had seemed so strangely absent. All was clear to him now, even in the whirl of his senses. For the first time he comprehended the curious absorption in herself which had hitherto seemed to make her deaf to his prettiest speeches.

She staggered as they went out. He felt her trembling, and found her a seat as quickly as possible in the conservatory. Ever afterwards the faint, sweet, subtle odour of the flowers, which seemed to be in harmony with her sensations, recurred to her as disagreeable.

'What was it? A little attack of faintness—giddiness—it was nonsense to make much of it,' she said in self-excuse. She was battling still with the sense of pain and mystery—the uncertainty which had lately haunted her with respect to Godfrey's fate. She had almost forgotten Mr. Lloyd's presence. If she thought of him at all, it was vaguely to wish that, without being guilty of impoliteness, she could send him back to the drawing-room.

Presently he said,

'Have you nothing to found a guess upon? I would help you if I could.'

'Ah, you can't—it's beyond your power.'

'You mean that this generous anxiety which troubles you has become a demon not so easy to exorcise. But, Miss Rashleigh, you must rise above the weakness—you must dismiss it, and not let it agitate you like this. There are others to make you happy. If I——'

There was something in his tone which sent a new dread through her. She looked altogether, as he thought afterwards, as if she were afraid of ghosts.

'Mr. Lloyd, you have laid me under an obligation, a great one already.' Her eyes, which were wide open, had still a look in them as of remonstrance, and as if they, more than the other parts of her body, were endowed with vitality. 'Don't be too hard on my foolishness,' she entreated. 'I have made one mistake in my life already—don't let us make another. Had we not better talk of something else?'

CHAPTER III.

'You foolish, foolish child! how is it you will always be your own worst enemy?' said Mrs. Austin, about an hour afterwards, when she found Vere sitting alone in the conservatory, and coupled her disconsolate attitude with the abrupt disappearance of one of her most honoured guests from the ball-room.

Vere had sunk into a chair, and was feeling just then as if she were unable to stand, looking at her quiet companions, the flowers, through the chinks between her fingers. She was alone, and never in her life before had the motherless girl felt so much as if she would have liked to have wept in the arms of some tenderly sympathising woman, like any other

girl yearning for help and advice. She had passed through a struggle, not an exhilarating one, which made her still feel more excitable and highly strung than usual. It was not in her to be conventional, or to attempt to hide the conscious red on her cheek. And as Mrs. Austin quietly closed the door of their retreat, Vere was debating the question within herself as to whether it would not be better to confide in some one, when that lady, in a direct, incisive voice, continued,

'To think you should be so good, so self-denying, and yet one of the proudest girls I ever knew! It is really quite odd that you should look so fresh and simple-looking, and yet have the—the——'

'The pride of Lucifer,' exclaimed the girl, sitting instantly upright, no longer blunderingly trying to make amends for disappointing Mrs. Austin in one of her most deep-laid plans, but longing to break down the conventions by which her life was trammelled.

'I suppose pride is a taint in the Rashleigh blood,' she added, a little sadly, and then the next

moment she determined to keep her own counsel, and even had recourse to a feeble womanly pretext, though she hated herself for it. 'I—I was feeling rather faint—and came in here to be alone, and not attract attention,' she stammered, knowing the half-fib as soon as she had uttered it.

'And the faintness was *not* associated with the friend on whose arm you leant?' said Mrs. Austin, quickly, excusing herself for the impoliteness of her speech on the score that Vere had no mother, and she was responsible to Sir Ralph in trying to influence her.

'Are you not apt to fancy things?' answered the younger lady, saying to herself, 'This sort of interference must be put a stop to.'

'Ah, I was right—she is not quite heart-whole,' thought the experienced woman, who prided herself on second-sight in these matters. 'My dear, there is some one else,' she said, seating herself beside her, and stroking her hand, 'I knew it all the time.'

'*What* did you know? excuse me for saying

you fancy things,' exclaimed Vere, withdrawing herself from the caress with a look of supplication as well as terror.

'Don't be afraid of me—I shall not betray your secret. You sent that poor young Sellwood away in a tiff—excuse the word, but you are like myself, and I am conscious at times of yielding to a little infirmity of temper—oh, he will come back again.'

The girl rallied herself. However kind the elder woman might be, she was quite certain *now* that she was not going to betray her feelings.

This sort of vivisection was intolerable. She suddenly found that she could rise to her feet.

'I don't like this kind of talk—you know I do not. I don't fancy most girls have those sort of ideas—that they can't be friends with a man without thinking of marrying him. I am not obliged to marry at all. I like my liberty too much. I don't feel as if I could give up my independence.'

'But,' said Mrs. Austin, in her most soft and

purring tones, 'you forget all the circumstances —there is your uncle.'

'You may be sure I shall never marry against my uncle's wishes.'

'Exceptional women may not care for marriage. A good many will find that they will have to do without it,' answered the matron, significantly. And she turned and left the friendless girl to feel still more friendless than before the interview.

Throughout that night, which was unnaturally hot, Vere sought relief at intervals in long-drawn breaths. Her limbs seemed to have grown stiff, and there was an odd sort of aching in her bones. The storm which had been expected came about two o'clock; and the girl, finding her remedy for sleeplessness did not succeed, rose softly and undid the lattice of her window. The air seemed to refresh her and help her to struggle against the nervous restlessness. And yet as she gazed over the soaked heather and reeking ferns of the moor which was close to the garden of Mrs. Austin's house, and as she listened to the murmur of the river

swollen into eddies, she thought of another almost outcast life, hurrying as restlessly as that river towards the vaster sea. One might have thought that she was listening for a whisper and for softly-falling footsteps, as after a time she gently closed the lattice, and divested herself of her warm dressing-gown that she might force herself to sleep.

The storm, and with it the great darkness of the night, was over. The stars could still be seen overhead. They would soon be fading in the morning light, and the busily-peopled world would be rousing itself to its usual routine.

What was her life?—the merest atom—like one of the dead leaves blown down on that soaking moor, and borne on in eddies and pools by the melancholy mud towards the darknesses, the silences. She shuddered and drew the curtain. After all, what right had she to any of these wild, yearning thoughts? What could it avail to look into any mystery with startled eyes?

'Oh, God!' she cried, as she tried to compose

herself for sleep and to put out of her mind self-reproachful thoughts concerning that other soul—which possibly had been carried on to the dread expanse of another life where the hope of meeting seemed to be so small—or at best was being buffetted in the struggle for existence amid the busy thoroughfares and highways of earth. 'And yet how I cared for him all the time. And it is I who drove him away and will be responsible if he dies—Oh, God, have mercy!' It was so short an exclamation that she did not recognise it as a prayer. And yet it was one of the first cries of a troubled heart which was athirst for God.

Mrs. Austin had not left her bed-room when Vere—scribbling a farewell message to her, and taking care to avoid Charlie Lloyd—set out waterproofed and goloshed on her homeward walk.

'Who was the young fellow making love to you, of whom Mrs. Austin tells me?' asked Sir Ralph, a few mornings afterwards, with one of those little flashes of irony in which he had begun to indulge of late. 'Well, there is no

accounting for tastes. Women are known by their lovers, whether they are of the vulgar and mean sort, or vice versa. It seems to me, from the innuendo which Mrs. Austin makes, that I have been mistaken in you, after all, and your tastes are of the degrading kind.'

'Oh, uncle!' said the poor girl, as she tried to sink into the depths of the old armchair, 'I assure you, Mrs. Austin knows nothing about it.'

Why should I dwell longer on this part of Vere's life? Biographies may be written at length, but stories are bits of a man's or woman's life. And the years which followed for Vere were to all human ken very unpicturesque bits. What such years are in the life of every man or woman, or to the 'great army of witnesses' watching their warfare, no human prophet can pretend to know!

They were years of trial, of struggle, of self-reproach, and of much misunderstanding, during which Vere did her best to be loyally true.

She went her rounds of duty in the house or in the village like a child, her heart at times deeply stirred, and yet determining not to give way to her depression.

The mere behaving ill to his niece had done Sir Ralph's character incredible harm. It had not only established what was evil in his nature, but had blocked up the natural channel of his affection. He persuaded himself that Vere did not care enough about him to show resentment when she was unjustly blamed. And when the soft-footed avenger was closely on his heels, and the inevitable lot of all men looked him horribly in the face, when a new disbelief in himself began slowly to dawn in his mind, his conscience gave him a few twinges, and Dot as well as Vere had to suffer from his irritable speeches.

The child began to hate her home, and then it was that Mrs. Austin, who had shown a lack of her usual social dexterity in the way in which she had visited her disappointment on the elder of the two girls, took the younger one in hand. She persuaded Sir Ralph to send his

daughter to boarding-schools, first to London, and next to Paris.

'You can't make young hearts beat in time to all the dry stuff written on your nasty old parchments,' she exclaimed one day, when she had intruded into the baronet's study, and found him stooping over learned folios, though it was no greater secret from her than from the other gossips in the neighbourhood that the doctor's mandate had gone forth. Sir Ralph was suffering from heart-disease, and ought to have fresh air and little fatigue.

'An old place fit for cats and mice,' was Mrs. Austin's verdict, when she returned to her bright house. It was no wonder to her that the little vivid-hearted Dot had shown a thorough scorn for the 'musty hole.' The child was impulsive to a fault, no doubt, but it was intolerable to think that she should be condemned like her cousin to trying all her life to pick grapes off thistles. The mediæval influences of the house and lands had, no doubt, told upon Vere, who did not resemble the ultra modern type of maidenhood, and whose bringing-up

had been remarkably in keeping with her surroundings.

'An odd girl—a very odd girl indeed,' Mrs. Austin invariably moralised; 'but what can you expect when she has always been kept cooped up at home, with nothing to feed upon but the old leaves of this genealogical tree? Why, my dear, she can't even look out for dead men's shoes—the property's mortgaged—and, as to the family, why, her uncle's the last of his line. It's quite romantic. Interesting people in themselves, but moving in *such* a morbid atmosphere.'

The remark about the morbid atmosphere became a hackneyed one, and at last was repeated to Vere, doing more perhaps to shake her out of her downheartedness than anything else.

'*Morbid atmosphere!*' she repeated, indignantly to herself, remembering that the sun partially behind clouds can never be precisely the same fertilising sun as if the skies are blue. To live a lonely, uncomprehended life had seemed to her at first, as it seems to all young things, harder than to die. She knew

that she *had* been sometimes in a morbid state that autumn—a mood in which a shower of dying leaves on the chill, wet earth, the half-stripped branches of a tree blowing against the sunset sky, or, for the matter of that, even a barrel-organ brought by a wretched little Italian boy from Torringmoor to be played beneath the park gates, could bring 'thoughts which lay too deep for tears.'

But when she heard Mrs. Austin's remark she began more than ever to scorn herself for helplessness, and to show the courage and nerve of a dozen men.

She no longer said, 'I can't drag on next year as I have dragged this.' She no longer felt a sense of the intolerable slowness of time, as if the moment must come when she could sit still no longer; but she determined that the eddies and the gusts of wind which must come to her in the future should not interfere with the calm depths of her life.

I remember once hearing a story which was repeated in mockery of prayer. It was of a poor, untaught old woman, desolate and sorrowful,

and knowing very few words, who complained to her priest that sometimes she could think of no prayer but an inarticulate one—it was, '*Oh-h! oh-h!*' The man whom she consulted did not laugh at her, but told her that his own prayers had at times been almost as difficult to resolve into words.

Vere had been so far unfortunate that hitherto she had known no living people, with lives beautiful as their teaching, to help her forward. But the sense of awe at the depths which may suddenly open out of any thinking life, lifted her heart to the Eternal Father. And if her prayers were at first not much longer than those of the child with 'no language but a cry,' at any rate they were intense ones: 'Lord, make me real—make me forget myself.'

She remembered that the essence of sin was selfishness, and determined not to spoil the lives of others by her regrets.

Painful as it was to part with Dot—the little one looked such a bud of youth, so bright-eyed, and yet from over-indulgence so ready to take the least fault-finding to heart—

Vere had not the heart to chain her to her own dull, grey present.

Her principal object in life was her uncle; next she thought of Reuben, and the task laid upon her in his case was doubly trying. But the outlook, which had been habitually sombre to Sir Ralph, became considerably lightened when Vere set herself daily to amuse and interest him. The old man had always tacitly counted on his niece's help, and the feeling that she was more than ever indispensable to him was in itself enough to make her life enjoyable.

Her attempts with Reuben were for a time entirely unsuccessful. But she persevered with the recollection of the good which she knew to be latent in every man, and which—as some means of making amends for her pride in the past—she thought it might be her duty to awaken in him. Her womanly intuition seemed to tell her that, if she could but look into his eyes with her own true ones, the harshness of his manner would be lessened; if not, she could only be repulsed, and she, in her new humility,

had ceased to shrink from the thought of hardness to herself.

'Godfrey asked me to look after him, and I can only try my best,' she repeated to herself, as, with a new sort of tact, she waylaid Reuben, and presented him with flowers. Next, she humbly asked permission to look at his books and pictures. And at last, when she had installed herself in the housekeeper's good graces, she took the old cynic's heart by storm, merely by obeying one of the sudden promptings of her heart. Sir Ralph had one of his fainting attacks, and it occurred to Vere that, painful as the wrench might be for her pride, it would be an opportunity to send a pathetic message to her neighbour, and easier than to let one of her necessarily small band of servants plod all the way to Torringmoor.

Even 'Akillis,' as the self-made man put it, had a 'humane place in his heel.' And Reuben had himself just such a spot in his heart, had Godfrey known how to touch it. He not only sent dainties, and port wine supposed to have existed as many years as old Parr, but he took

to the *rôle* of benefactor so heartily that he wrote a letter to Vere, and she answered it in person.

To be sure it was only one step of the ladder which she had decreed that he should mount. But as she reasoned—when she sometimes talked to herself, for want of somebody else to talk to,

'If I can get him up one step of the ladder, it will be easier for him to reach the next. And then, Godfrey—oh! my dear, if you never know *me* as I really am—you will have your father.'

CHAPTER IV.

SEVEN years had passed—more than six since Godfrey left the boarding-house—and spring was coming round again. The same season of the year which witnessed the opening of the Royal Academy and the Grosvenor Exhibition was brightening the hedges and ditches with primrose and cowslip, bluebell and violet. Godfrey was busily painting on china some of these products of the fields. His 'bread-getting work,' as he was fond of calling it, had little in common with that 'transcendent capacity to take pains' which is apt to be more successful than all the doubts and tremors of despondent genius. It was difficult to associate a man whose manners were still so refined with

what is vulgarly called 'Bohemianism,' and yet the manner in which Godfrey picked up his living might have been fairly called Bohemian.

He was quick to avail himself of the motley advantages provided by the art-revival which had already set in. All was grist available for his unpretentious mill—whether it was an engagement for painting sunflowers on kettle-drum tables, or storks and swallows on grey-green satin to be stretched dado-wise round a West-end boudoir. This was perhaps the best paid work that he had done—the more so that Hunter, the vulture, could not claim any premium on it. And Godfrey, as well as many other workers from hand to mouth, reaped an occasional windfall from the fact that the Englishman—who had been amused from his childhood with hideous toys, taught his lessons in a hideous school-room, and condemned to eat his dinner sitting on a hideous chair and eating off a hideous plate—was beginning to rise to ecstatic adoration of the somewhat ghastly beauties of Mr. Burne Jones, and the 'Nocturnes' of Mr. Whistler. The Eastern

carpets and Japanese knicknacks which were already being introduced could scarcely be said to add to Godfrey's profits. But the rushes and Lent lilies which had to be painted on looking-glasses—for the delectation of fair ladies with filleted hair, attired in what they supposed to be Greek costumes—opened to him a fresh source of making money.

Still his sense of failure had become painful—his disillusion remained most trying. He was not a step nearer to making the 'name' of which he had spoken to Vere, and he had heard nothing from his father; but, in his desire to free himself from the companionship of Hunter, he had disregarded the doctor's warning. He had been glad to take anything that offered in the literary way. One day it was a small pencilling for *Judy*—not of course one of the larger cartoons—and on another some society verses to fill a corner in *Vanity Fair;* and there was often the same dreary penny-a-lining for the *Family Enlightener.*

It could scarcely have been possible for him not to have made some sort of living after

battling for so many years with the world. He could afford better food, but the continuous strain of overwork, disappointment, and mental anxiety—to say nothing of the want of sufficient nourishment in the past—had weakened his powers of resistance against the inroads of disease. The new lodging which he had chosen was in the neighbourhood of Tottenham Court Road. The locality was squalid and the rooms ugly. Godfrey's own little sanctum—which he had adorned with flowers at the windows, and with some of the wood-carving which he was accustomed to sell for brackets, book-slips, and paper-knives—was somewhat better than his surroundings. But he heard enough just then of the jargon which was talked and written of men who called themselves 'æsthetes,' to make him sometimes remember that Nero had been an æsthete, and that great art epochs had been periods of cruelty and corruption. He began to be a little sick of the 'art slang. For behind his lodgings were miserable slums, in which the poorer classes were herded together in a state of de-

gradation bordering on starvation. And he longed for a little more of the robust common-sense, for which the nation was supposed to be renowned, that these people might be helped out of their swinish lives and roused, as by a trumpet-call, to a sense of something more exalted.

All his own nostrums seemed to have failed, for these men did not care to be preached to about 'Art,' and, till their miserable habitations were pulled down, it seemed to be useless to lecture them about drunkenness, or to get them to bestir themselves to get out of the mire.

'They are the people, and *I* belong to the people; yet, if I were in their condition, I daresay I should think as they do,' he said to himself, disheartened, when Hunter rallied him on the absurdity of his attempts.

Some of Godfrey's friends would have said that it was characteristic of his eccentricity, if they could have been informed that he had chosen this uninviting retreat, fascinated by the refined and motherly face of the woman who presided over it. And, now that his

monetary circumstances had improved, he never regretted his choice. For Mrs. Morton was more fortunate than he had been. He was surprised at those whom she managed to discover amongst the very poor—leading noble, thoughtful, and even dignified lives. He began no longer to think of poverty and degradation as if they were convertible terms. Mrs. Morton informed him, after the two became intimate, that some of the people in the 'back slums' were by no means so terrible as they had been described. She, at least, had been always amongst them, and had never experienced insult or rebuff. If Godfrey had not already realised the mistake of the exploded idea that riches are necessary to refinement, his new acquaintance with Mrs. Morton would have been enough to make him do so.

'I am tired of being wandering and unsettled. I don't see why I should not settle down here,' he said to her, after the first week spent in her house; and she answered him with a smile which he found hard to interpret.

A glimmering of suspicion crossed his mind

that she was as well-bred, and nearly as well-read on some subjects, as he was himself. She had a fine, honest face, which looked somewhat old for her years; but when she smiled it was transfigured as with an inward light. It was not till long afterwards that Godfrey heard that his surmises were correct, and that Mrs. Morton—after passing through many more of the shocks of fate than he had ever encountered—had voluntarily selected this spot in her childless widowhood, that she might, as she expressed it, 'keep herself without being a burden to her friends;' though she said nothing about her much stronger motive of being able to hold out a helping hand to those who were struggling in the darkness and with the dangers of the place.

'A God-forsaken hole!' one man had called it. But to Mrs. Morton no place was God-forsaken.

The message of the first age of Christianity to the sorrow-stricken, jaded, and down-trodden social outcasts had lost none of its import for her—that message of the kingdom had a special

meaning still. She never wearied of proclaiming it, losing none of her courage amid the great whirlpool of human beings, the seething multitude of souls among whom she had chosen to cast her lot, and some of whom were besotted with evil ways and with sins of every dye.

It was astonishing how this woman had managed to become a centre of influence to those around her. Every day she sallied forth with her basket—as Godfrey at first supposed, to purchase the beef-steak or chop which now took the place of the potatoes and dripping—but as he heard afterwards to minister out of her own pocket to the moaning, despairing, faithless men and women, who seemed to be in ignorance of the ordinary principles which regulate human life.

She was too wise to take upon herself the appearance of instructing these desperate, sullen men, whose children were perishing of disease and hunger, of ignorance and vice, and whose new gospel was the inextinguishable war of classes. She knew that they had an aversion to precepts which seemed to

be cut and dried, and to formulas which had become to them too much of a dead letter. But she won them by degrees, and strangely enough without having money to give them, and without sensational excitement. The outstretched hands of those wretched ones, who were some of them crying for bread, might have clutched at her bounty had she been rich and become dependent on her. Silver and gold she had none, but the revelation of the Master's life had penetrated to the very core of her own being, and she transmitted it to others by living it as well as by gently teaching it. She toiled day and night to get the people around her to be more honest, more cleanly, more industrious, and to let them have some glimpse of those delectable mountains of which she herself in the darkest days never seemed to lose sight.

It was characteristic of Mrs. Morton that when some one spoke to her of 'those terrible sceptics which were springing up everywhere like toad-stools,' she answered, brightly confident,

'Those are hard words to use. I should think it wiser not to use them. There are doubts which shake faith but cannot destroy it. Who can wonder that they have them?'

'But are you not afraid?'

'Not a bit of it. I believe in regenerating love—in a redemption which is being wrought out by suffering, especially for the poor. Did not He say, "Blessed are the poor"? Did not He come to teach them how their very discontent is blessed and to "turn their sorrow into joy"? But go to them and tell them that it is all a bigot's dream—that there is no Father, no future, and no justice but in the name. Then what you fear will happen. The masses will rise. How will they be able to bear the long toil of their monotonous lives? There will be a struggle for human existence in which the weakest must succumb.'

It was wonderful how this woman, no longer standing on the vantage ground of youth, seemed to be a living embodiment of Thekla's epitaph, in a far wider significance,

'We have lived and loved,
We live and love.'

It was well for Godfrey that he had taken refuge with her; for returning home one day past a house which had caught fire, whilst the Fire Brigade—of which there was always a smaller attendance in the daytime than at night—had not arrived, he stopped to make inquiries. The people on the ground floor were busily occupied in securing their property, and it was not until after some delay that Godfrey obtained the information that a child and its mother were upstairs and could not be got at.

'Are none of you going to do anything? Do you call yourselves *men?*' he asked, as some of the people who were standing about stolidly shook their heads and muttered something about having to 'think o' their hown wives and children.'

One of the more intelligent grumbled something more about the inefficiency of the Fire Brigade. But Godfrey did not wait to hear him grumble. He rushed up the wooden stairs, half-

blinded by the smoke, and succeeded in reaching the second floor. The rooms had been deserted and tongues of fire were darting from them. But the crowd outside was already stirred to sympathetic excitement, and—though no one offered to follow Godfrey in his mad adventure—voices shouted to him from below that the mother and little-one were on the third floor. With ready presence of mind he forced himself to face the flames which were issuing from the doors of the rooms, contriving to shut both doors in spite of singed hair and the scorching of skin. Then, hardly conscious of the physical pain in his state of excitement, he dashed up the remaining stairs, never forgetting the sight which met his eyes, of the young mother who sat stupified with smoke and fear, and looking at him as if her eyes alone belonged to the living. He called to her, but she did not hear. There was no time to make her understand. Seizing her by one arm and dragging her by mere force down the stairs, he took the baby in the other, and, regardless of its terrified cries, succeeded in saving both. His re-appearance

was greeted with enthusiastic cheers, the more so that a few minutes afterwards the staircase fell in, and the firemen arrived amid the execrations of the mob, when it was too late for their efforts to be of any avail.

Amid that volley of curses and wailing exclamations—leading to a scuffle with some police who came up at that moment, and valorously took the part of the other officials—Godfrey managed to escape. He returned to his lodgings, ashamed of his sensation of faintness—a nausea which was caused by intolerable pain, a sense of thirst which was hard to bear, and a throbbing of the temples against which he struggled in vain.

Any other lodging-house keeper might have exclaimed at him in horror as he tottered, apparently in a semi-drunken condition, to the steps of her house. But Mrs. Morton's motherly heart went out to him at once. Women who have no direct duties, and are above the drudgery of common life, are apt to become fastidious and fine. But a man's greatest extremity was this good woman's opportunity.

She had known that Godfrey was suffering, but the intimacy had hitherto been principally on her side. He had been naturally reserved with her about the circumstances of his life. She knew little of his antecedents, and sometimes wondered sorrowfully if he, with his refined instincts, was aware of the downward path taken by some of the men with whom he consorted. Hunter, the man of trembling limb, of withered brain, and with the pitiable premature decay of old age induced by drink, had been his associate. The partnership puzzled Mrs. Morton. Not that she deplored the premature decay in Hunter; she looked upon it as the Lord's merciful fashion of weaning His self-willed children from love of that which is loathsome and plague-spotted, so that the poison-plants may be eradicated which lead to disease and death.

None of Godfrey's friends came near him at this crisis. For days, and even for weeks, he was in the valley of the shadow, tossing in fever and in delirium.

The fever proved non-infectious, but some of

Mrs. Morton's other lodgers thought it necessary to forsake the house. It gave her the more time to attend to the invalid, and she could not help obtaining the key to a good many of the mysteries which had puzzled her, when she listened unwillingly to Godfrey's delirious ravings. But the very ravings reassured her. They convinced her that there were no germs of meanness or untruthfulness in the soil of this man's heart; and though she did not like the fierce intensity of feeling with which at times he railed against fate, still she considered that, though the oversensitiveness was unfortunate, it had probably been due to the weakened and morbid state of his bodily health.

Godfrey had a sensation in the intervals of consciousness—in which he seemed to be lying almost within the veil, and was powerless in his state of physical prostration to do more than make a sign to be supplied with some cooling drink—of the brightness of the countenance which was bending over him, as if, more than any other person whom he had ever met, this woman seemed to be standing

face to face with the Divine glory. It was the encouraging brightness of this smile which helped him to rally his strength in the most terrible crisis of his illness.

His room seemed to be full of some soft diffused light as his clouded brain cleared at last, and memory—returning to him in slow waves—led him to recognise the fact that the spring sunshine was pouring in through the one window. The blind had been slightly drawn up, and some daffodils, which he did not remember to have purchased, were standing in a glass of water on a table by his side.

'Where am I?' he asked, trying to raise himself in vain, and becoming conscious of his own impotence, as Mrs. Morton smoothed his pillow and answered, with a bright look,

'Where else but in your own room?'

'*My own room!* You are laughing at me. I have made no money—I have nothing to repay you,' he muttered, looking anxiously, first in one direction, and then in another.

'Hush, hush! you must not excite yourself—

I shall be abundantly repaid,' answered the soothing, motherly voice. For this woman, from long habit, was accustomed to think of the sick as if they were her treasures, and of sufferings of soul and body as if she was never to shun them—they were her natural domain.

'I do not understand,' he repeated, almost irritably, as soon as she allowed him to speak again; 'you ought to turn me out in the streets. I tell you I cannot repay you. Let me die like a dog in the gutter—I can't take advantage of you.'

'That is one of your morbid sayings,' she answered, as she held to his lips a cup of beef-tea.

'Then you do not think I am going to die?' he questioned, a little anxiously, with that dread of seeming cowardly which made him not like to admit how death at the threshold of a life in which so little had been accomplished seemed to him to mean loss, solitude, retribution.

'You cannot live on air,' she answered, good-humouredly. 'You tried that experi-

ment too long before you came to live with me. The love of life is a divinely ordered law—but some day when you are stronger I will tell you what I think of what men call death. To me it has nothing to do with ghastly shadows—nor do I see why there should be anything hard in the unconscious dropping of the garment of mortality.'

He listened, conscious of not following her with the interest which he might have felt before his dreary period of disillusion.

Years of disappointment and mortification stretched behind him in which it had been hard to believe in the goodness of God. He used to think he believed in it, but of late he was not sure. His mind previous to his illness had been in that sort of state which is commonly called 'unsettled,' while Mrs. Morton's sure trust resembled the 'steadfastness' of the apostles.

'All this sounds eloquent enough,' he remarked, a little wearily, 'if this sort of thing were true. But you know as well as I do that the majority of people go on now as they al-

ways did as if they did not believe in it.'

'*Do they not?*' she said, laying down her needlework for a minute as if considering, but with nothing of that disconcerted look in her face which he had expected to see. 'Then it is better they should speak out. I have had much to do with sick nursing, and I know that when there are certain diseases in the blood it is better that the malady should come to a head. Nature sometimes cures it then without the intervention of the cautery and the knife. But at any rate it is better it should come out. The conflict with unbelief in our days,' she added, a few moments afterwards, 'is to my mind not at all calculated to make one despair. For when men question anxiously and soberly, and are even desirous of being convinced, one cannot help being very hopeful about the final issue.'

He thought he should like to paint her portrait as that of a living embodiment of faith, as she looked at him with shining eyes, and gave him that unexpected answer.

CHAPTER V.

GODFREY'S recovery was retarded by his impatient desire to repay this good Samaritan who had lost so much for his sake.

The food which she continued to purchase for him when he could not even pay his rent seemed to choke him. And, had he been still sufficiently ill to entitle him to enter a hospital, he would have fled from her rather than continue to live at her expense.

At the same time he had but just emerged from one of those heart-shaking crises—when he had seemed to see more than is discerned by mortal eyes—and to have passed through one of those unutterable experiences, of which the invalid returning to life finds it impossible to

speak, but which are no doubt vouchsafed to the dying. The spiritual world, on which he had often speculated before, had become an awful reality.

Whilst the mood lasted, nothing could be more congenial than Mrs. Morton's friendship. Godfrey had all his life been denied the natural outlets of tenderness, and the discovery of Mrs. Morton's perfect gentlehood as well as the culture which she betrayed by her conversation, and the fact that he could speak to a woman of her age more frankly than to a younger one, did much to cheer him. It made him sometimes reflect that it was a good thing for him to have been brought into connection with life in all its phases, if only that he might know how, under such conditions, a noble woman might live a simple and elevated existence, breathing the invigorating air of the heights, while her feet were hurrying on busy errands of usefulness in the by-ways and paths of the most unlovely flats. The discovery of greatness in the midst of folly, and of nobility in the midst of meanness, would at any time have pleased his artistic instincts.

Yet now when he was recovering from so severe an illness that he seemed to see men through a mist like trees walking; now when as yet he was unable to shake off the sensation of how the world and all its objects had seemed to be reeling away from him—so that it required an effort of the will to rally the steadiness of his brain—there was much in the unselfish devotion of this motherly woman to gratify that yearning for sympathy—the unutterable and insatiable need of such a man—which had long been pent up in him.

Godfrey, under other circumstances, would have been the first to refuse to be taught, schooled into proprieties, or patted condescendingly on the back by a stranger. But, unconsciously to himself, he was just in that crisis of a man's life when the iron is heated and malleable, and when a few strokes serve to fashion it as a weapon for usefulness or an instrument for evil, and day by day Mrs. Morton was doing more to mould him than he ever afterwards knew.

'I can easily understand that you did not like

to have this money showered on you when you did not know how it had been obtained. But I should not have thought it was like you not to keep up some communication with your father. Think how a man of his strong nature must have suffered,' she said to him one day, when she had heard his story.

'He cast me off with curses.'

'And how would it be if God were to forsake us for ever, when—in our wild passion—we cast off His mercy?'

'He has made no sign.'

'You acknowledge there were advertisements. If not actually in his name, you may depend upon it that they were worded with his consent.'

Godfrey did not answer.

I have conveyed a wrong impression if I have made my readers fancy that this was a woman who 'preached.' On the contrary, she was one to shrink from any exhibition of feeling which fell short of action, and had a horror of that incipient hypocrisy which borders on immodesty.

The formal and continual introduction of religious emotions and opinions into intercourse with others would have seemed to such an one to be in a measure unreal, and an unnecessary waste of spiritual strength.

But there were times when she could not be put to shame, when it seemed to be necessary for her to speak out, and when she had inspiring thoughts for the harassed, the defamed, and the dejected.

'Well, after all, you could hardly have expected to succeed without credentials, without even being able to make use of your degree, because you had determined to withhold the name which was your own. I don't see, as you say yourself, that you have much to complain of. No fair man will feel being beaten in competition, and I am sure you are not one to trumpet your own slights and injuries,' she answered, in a cheery voice.

And so it was that, with the returning strength of convalescence, Godfrey felt unable to take an unhealthy view of his own trials in

life. He felt ashamed of even mentioning them when he heard of how this woman, whose joy so continually surmounted her depression, had been called upon to part with four of her children—one of whom, a son, had lived to be as old as he was himself.

'They have not *really* been taken from me. The world of spirits unseen is as real and, perhaps, more so than the material world—not future, not distant, but present in a sense which we cannot understand. "We look," as St. Paul says, "not at the things which are seen,"' she tried to explain.

If the comforting thought was a mistaken one, it was not Godfrey who would disabuse her of it.

'He *cannot* have given us these strong affections which rivet us to each other to destroy them, and to torture us,' she exclaimed, with what seemed to him at first such an astonishing sense of certainty. 'He is justice and love. My dear ones are not even separated from me now, and, when I go to them in His good time,

we shall know each other again, for He is good, and they live in Him.'

It would be difficult to describe the exact time when Godfrey, who, if he did not become imbued with *all* Mrs. Morton's opinions, yet recognised the reality of a religion which did not consist in sudden emotions, nor in aptness in controversy, but in a life the mainsprings of which were hidden from the eyes of men. He did not adopt her way of talking, but he began somehow to feel that she was right in speaking of the relationships between men and women as if they were symbols of relations to a higher Power, and to long, in a conscience-stricken sort of way, after the well-being of his own father. He had heard of religious people—women especially—who supposed Christian love to be so diffusive as not to admit of concentration on the individual. He had had a horror of those who neglected the charities of private life. But Mrs. Morton was a new revelation to him. She believed because she loved; she loved because she believed.

'The effective way of loving the world at large is to begin by intimate affection or friendship for those about us,' she told him, with a motherly smile.

And, whether he agreed with her or not, he had no heart to contradict the woman who had borne her own troubles so bravely. It was almost as if she were laughing him out of his. He had never seen her laugh at him, but her cheerful way of taking everything had much the same effect.

'We each of us feel as if our own peculiar burden were the worst,' she said, merrily—stitching away at some fancy-work which just then she was thankful to undertake—not having told him about the other lodgers, whom no argument on earth had been able to convince that nervous fever was not infectious. 'The mystery of why such troubles are laid upon us is one which neither you nor I, nor thousands of our fellow-creatures, are likely to be able to solve. But what does it matter? We shall know all about it in such a very short time,' she added, in the manner which at first had

seemed to him so quaint, as she held up the garment on which she was working. It was some pretty, dark, clinging stuff, and she was embroidering it with irises in different shades of blue.

He could not help thinking how handsome she would look still in such a dress herself, and then decided that she was better as she was, in her rusty black and clean white tippet, and that expression in her face which reminded him of St. Augustine's mother, Monica.

He was turning over the paper, busily searching for advertisements. In his anxiety to be no longer dependent on her, many seemed to him to suit his case which in the old days he would have discarded for fear of discovery.

One met his eye now, appearing in several of the morning papers.

'Wanted, a secretary. A clear handwriting, prompt, business habits, some classical knowledge, some acquaintance with continental languages, and some aptness at English composition will be required. Preference will be

given to applicants who have had experience in journalism, and especially to graduates of Oxford or Cambridge. Work not fatiguing, and salary fair.'

Godfrey pondered. Nothing would have been so trying to him as to offer himself for a post for which he felt himself to be incompetent. But here was an appointment which seemed to be made for him—a round hole waiting for the proper ball to fit it. Dozens of more independent appointments, in the Post Office or the Treasury, would have been open to him before through the door of the Civil Service examinations. But these had been more or less public. He had not been afraid of the necessary fag for these things, but he had a terrible fear of discovery.

Looking at Mrs. Morton, busily occupied with her daily work, he wondered where all these scruples had vanished now.

As he answered the advertisement, succinctly and in his clearest hand-writing, he thought how little the round, school-boy caligraphy resembled the hurried scribble which he used to write at St. Anne's. But to learn to write

clearly and in a larger hand—instead of the Oxford characters, reduced to their tiniest proportions, of which one London editor had facetiously said that he required glasses unusually strong to read them, and must therefore decline Mr. Godfrey's lucubrations—had been one of the new accomplishments which he had obliged himself to cultivate.

In twenty-four hours he received an answer, appointing a certain time for him to go to a house in the neighbourhood of Pall Mall. A man-servant in plain clothes opened the door, and Godfrey was shown into an ante-room, which was filled, as well as the hall, with a crowd of grave, anxious-looking men. He counted thirty-five, and gathered courage from the fact that, though several of them had gentlemanly, intellectual-looking faces, most of them wore clothes more seedy than his own. There was a murmur of talk and some low grumbling among the few who seemed to be acquainted with each other; while the man-servant—who surely wore felt slippers—ascended noiselessly to the upper room, and came

back, after a time, with the information that it would be necessary for his master to speak personally to only six of the thirty-five candidates.

The names were read aloud from a strip of paper with which he had been provided. The first name was 'Allen,' the second, in alphabetical order, 'Godfrey.'

Mr. Allen—a half-starved, unprepossessing man, and whose face unmistakably bore the mark of Grub Street—was not long upstairs. Evidently no conclusive answer had been given to him, and Godfrey found himself next, following the servant with catlike tread up the stairs. His own boots were splashed, and grievously old; his garments—too large for him since the emaciation caused by the fever—fell round him in loose folds, and the hat which he held in his hand was dilapidated. A humorous smile crossed his face as he saw his own figure reflected in numerous looking-glasses as he ascended the stairs.

'Sydney Smith would say this was a meeting of beggars, instead of a meeting of the clergy,'

he thought, as the figure on one occasion, duplicated and trebled, looked haggardly at him from an arrangement of the mirrors.

In another minute he was being ushered into a back room on the drawing floor. A gentleman's study, furnished with all the new appurtenances—a square Turkey carpet, parquet flooring, dark sage-green walls, with a dado supposed to be of a deeper sage than the walls, a brass fire-place, and fender of the same irreproachable material, a large carved-oak writing table, and comfortable carved-oak chair.

The room seemed to be so dark that Godfrey, still dazed and weak, could at first but faintly distinguish the figure of a man, standing with his back to him, as the confidential valet disappeared.

In the moment which elapsed before the man turned round, Godfrey was conscious of a strange sensation. The figure was familiar to him. Surely he had fled from it on more than one occasion, when he had hurried back from the West End and other crowded thoroughfares, thanking his stars that his old friend

would be unable to recognise him, and knew nothing of his less frequented haunts. It was but a short time before his illness, when Godfrey—feeling the want of air, and straying, in urgent need of it, through Kensington Gardens—had seen the same man turning away from the path in which the two might have come face to face with each other, and taking a short cut in the direction of the Albert Memorial. Godfrey had resisted the impulse more than once to run after him, and make himself known. His heart had yearned after the man who seemed now to be happy and prosperous, but this very prosperity had made it impossible for him to seem to ask alms of Charlie Lloyd.

There was no escape now. Charlie Lloyd had turned round, and though both men had altered—Godfrey the most of the two—it was impossible for either to escape recognition.

There was no exclamation, as there might have been between women. Both looked at each other—one with startled eyes, and the other with something like triumph. It was an embarrassing moment for both. Neither could

help feeling a little confused, being hardly able to pursue the ordinary code of manners, which *may* fit the requirements of ordinary life, but is certainly not equal to such dilemmas.

At the first glance Godfrey saw that Charlie was more shrewd and sharp-eyed than he had been in the past. Time had broadened his figure somewhat prematurely; luxuriously-reared men of moderate height, accustomed to plenty of wine and to a good deal of dining out, being apt to lose the trimness of their build before the less self-indulgent. The second glance showed that though he was quick-witted as ever and ready to pose in becoming characters—a habit which he had contracted in the past, a consequence of being petted—still he was probably as loveable as before.

'Immensely loveable,' Godfrey still thought him, as rallying himself instantly, Mr. Lloyd strode across the room, and grasped his old friend by the hand.

'Not a word,' he said, as he pushed Godfrey with gentle force into an arm-chair, and placed

before him a cordial, from a cupboard in an inner room, in the shape of a glass of wine, 'not a word till you have taken this.'

Godfrey gently pushed it away.

'I have seen enough of reduced wretches like myself taking that sort of stuff at all hours between meals.'

'You don't look as if you had had many meals. Even Pharaoh's lean kine would have put more flesh on your bones,' said Charlie, as he retreated to the brass fender, to which he turned his back, and, standing with his legs a little apart, surveyed his old friend meditatively. 'Well, my Gracchus, I always said you had what some of the Americans are supposed to call a "darned lot of queer notions in your brain,"—not that any American in real life ever talked like that—but I couldn't have prophesied that such clever notions would have brought you to such a pass.'

'I have been ill—any man may be that,' answered Godfrey, with a flush on his cheek, and tossing back the fair hair which apparently had run to seed like the rest of him—being longer

and curlier than in the 'Auld Lang Syne.' He added, 'You had better let me go. I think it is a pity to spoil an old recollection. I—I should have liked you to keep a green place in the corner of your memory for me. It is weak of me, but if I had known it had been *you* who advertised I should not have come.'

'More than one person can hide his head like an ostrich in the sand,' answered Charlie, with his coat-tails still towards the brass fireplace, but surveying Godfrey critically, and ready to produce more wine and even cognac, to the extent of interfering with the liberty of the subject, should that queer pallor increase, 'but I simply kept back my name for business purposes, and you—what excuse have you to offer for coolly dropping your family patronymic?'

'It is a pity to brush the bloom of a remembrance off an old friendship,' muttered Godfrey, hardly knowing what he said, 'you must be ashamed to think how often you were my willing guest at Oxford.'

'And I should be glad enough to be your

guest just now, if it were possible, old fellow. No, never talk of an ideal being destroyed because a friend is poor and in difficulties,' he retorted, with a flash of boyish enthusiasm. 'It is you who have treated *us* badly, never answering our other advertisements.'

'I did not see them. It must have been when I was ill, or too hard at work to look at advertisements. When I mentioned my real name to her, my landlady informed me of the fact of which I was ignorant. You must not over-estimate my passion for self-sacrifice.'

'How was it you did not pursue the clue when your landlady told you?'

'The advertisement was not from my father.'

'It was from friends who cared for you.'

'You mean that because I am a pauper, if I apply to my friends, they will be ready with their stray shillings. You do not understand. I might come to sweep a crossing, but as to alms I would accept none of them.'

'But surely your father——?'

Godfrey felt it his duty explain. The upshot was that for the first time Charlie Lloyd

thoroughly understood how absolute the breach had been between Godfrey and Reuben.

He became accustomed to the answering of the subdued voice, and realised how this man had been over red-hot ploughshares, and had drunk of the dregs of the cup of humiliation in the seven years struggle through which he had passed.

'Ah! I see,' he answered, after a pause, 'you wanted, without exactly knowing it, to reverse in your own case the private selfishness which led to your father's determination to rise. You were actuated by a benevolent desire for the welfare of the human race; but—it was impracticable—quite Utopian. Well, what have you done for the working-man?'

'I have been one myself.'

'*You* one of the great unwashed?'

'The name has no meaning. I have supported myself by wood-carving at times, and found it as lucrative as ill-paid painting. I took my work to the shops. Why—there is all the difference between an honest British workman and a slave of Sesostris.'

It was a whimsical sort of consolation, so like the old Godfrey. His old friend smiled to himself as he listened to it.

'It would be a pity if, after all, you regretted it. That would spoil the romance,' he said, speaking a little dryly. 'Now *I*—I never cared to be heroic; but I should not, if I were one, be a reluctant hero.'

'But you have always tried to do your duty?'

'Every honest man does that.'

Mr. Lloyd laughed again as he uttered this platitude; this time a little harshly.

'Ah!' he added, 'you have been battered about in the world; but, after all, I know more about it than you do.'

'I was not in a position to learn much. The struggle was too great for the necessaries of life.'

'It is better to fail sometimes in trying to do what is right.'

It sounded again like a copy-book maxim when Charlie had uttered it. He was not given to moralising, and was rather amused when Godfrey took it seriously, and answered, quietly,

'Yes, I believe there are successful men

whose hearts ache more bitterly than those of the unsuccessful.'

'Is all this struggling after one's ideal worth while?' asked the other, lightly.

'Not perhaps if this were the *only* life,' answered his old friend, with a far-away look which staggered Charlie, and made him fear for a moment that it would scarcely do to engage this man as secretary, since it might bring him in contact with a funeral. 'And yet I don't know,' said Godfrey, correcting himself. 'Even if it were so, it would be infinitely better always to aim high, and do one's best for the race.'

'Well, you must have the courage of your opinions. But you must understand that, as my secretary, they have nothing to do with *mine*,' answered Charlie, with a little more of the high-born Mæcenas, who thinks he can patronise a bread-getter, about him than, a few minutes before, Godfrey had thought possible.

'My opinions on some points are not so settled as they used to be. As a man grows older, he sees both sides of a subject better,' answered Sellwood, quietly.

He was used to wet blankets and wasted opportunities. Disappointment had been his daily bread, and he began to think that this interview would turn out as others had done.

But Charlie Lloyd seemed to regret the sharpness of this speech as soon as he had uttered it. He rang the bell before he spoke again, and, when the man-servant appeared, gave orders.

'Bring coffee and biscuits. This gentleman does not take wine before his dinner. And tell the other men downstairs, with my compliments, that I will let them know again if I have any need of them.'

The man brought the coffee, eyeing Godfrey's long hair and his mis-fitting, shabby coat with a look of the keenest disapproval.

'Well—you belonged to the reddest of Red Republicans, if I remember rightly, at St. Anne's, though you were too shy to talk yourself into fame at the Union. I—I know I talked a lot of nonsense, and had the intellectual measles as bad as anyone,' said Mr. Lloyd, when the valet had left, with a genial laugh, a

return of his happy, confident manner, and that comfortable security as to the fact that everybody was going to like him which had made the world from his boyhood more or less of a fairy-tale to him.

'I don't think I was *quite* so bad as that, though I did not see so clearly as I do now that, if the cause of order is to be deprived of its present powerful auxiliaries, the selfish instincts of mankind may come to the front somewhat disagreeably,' answered Godfrey, with an echo of the laugh which was good to hear.

'You didn't talk so didactically in the old days.'

'No; if one said a thing then, one had to be striking as well as amusing. Do you remember talking once in my room of "those soft undercurrents of sound which grease the wheels of time"? And you were angry with me for wanting to abolish the House of Lords as a "grotesque anachronism."' And both men laughed heartily again. They could not help being tickled at the recollection of the charming insolence, the naïve assurance, and the

fresh pertinacity of the youthful convictions of the young orators at the Union. 'Dreadful young Radicals!' they had called each other in badinage; but more than half the startling opinions which had been broached by them had been taken up for the sake of argument.

'It was good practice. I know I was bad enough; but then I had no mother to shock. Well, I shouldn't be honest if I did not confess to you that I soon found there were questions of more importance than vague schemes of philanthropy to be settled amongst the working men, whom I tried to think of as my mates.'

Charlie's laugh rang out again as it used to do in the old days.

'So far as I remember, we arraigned principles and not things,' he said, by way of turning off the subject. 'At any rate, we thought we went to Oxford to *study*, and not to gain prizes. If I remember rightly, my studies were principally in the way of breakfast-parties and human nature; and yours—you had a fair smattering of classical knowledge and a first-rate acquaint-

ance with English literature—that is the very thing I am looking for now. By-the-by, your frankly-expressed opinions were greatly exaggerated at Torringmoor.'

'And you have been at Torringmoor?' asked Godfrey, flushing again, the change of complexion betokening, as his keen-eyed new employer thought, either some unusually strong emotion or great delicacy of health. 'Did you see——'

'I saw more than one person who was very charming,' answered Charlie, pointedly, as he pulled out his watch and looked at the time. 'Do you know we had better get to business? I never like to discuss friends whom we have in common.'

The pucker on his brow did not escape the notice of Godfrey, whose transient colour quickly faded, leaving him very pallid.

'All is fair,' thought the other man, 'in love and war. The poor dear fellow has behaved like an idiot, and when the girl ceases to pity him, he will quietly be let down from his pedestal.'

He was glad for many reasons of the meeting, for he prided himself on not letting love overbalance his friendship. But, now that the start would be a fair one between them, he could scarcely help thinking, as he glanced at Godfrey's stooping figure and pallid face, that the innings would be certain to be all on his side.

'To return to our muttons, as the French put it. I remember you were a smart writer, a great reader in the old days,' he said, encouragingly, 'and that you were apt to bother your brains about more things than were good for you. Forgive me—I was a little careless just now—I ought not to have alluded to the past. But I think it fair to tell you that your father is much improved. Miss Rashleigh is a witch; no one knows how, but she has quite won his heart. The old cottages are pulled down, and new comfortable dwellings have been put up. She goes to him and reads to him as she used to do to her uncle.'

Did Godfrey hear aright? The buzz in his ears, and sparks which seemed to come before

his eyes, illuminating a sort of darkness, prevented him from hearing much, as Charlie proceeded to give an account of his own affairs.

'Was it possible that Charlie Lloyd could mean such a thing as *that?*' he asked, as he tried to put away the thought about Vere.

He dimly heard that Mr. Lloyd's elder brother had lived for some time a sort of death-in-life, that it could be only a question of time as to when the paralytic sufferer would be released from his log-like life, and that meanwhile on the second brother devolved all the management of the estate.

'One can scarcely desire him to live, and yet, you see, I may some day be a member of that effete institution—the House of Lords,' said Charlie, with difficulty suppressing another of his hearty laughs. 'There are peers who have been nobodies, but who worked hard when they were young. There are some who have earned rank, and others who have inherited it. But I shall be a sort of piebald horse —a peer who has positively inherited his rank, and yet has known what it is to earn his bread.'

'I daresay you will make a very calm, sensible, jovial old gentleman,' Godfrey would have said, if he had uttered his thoughts aloud. As it was, he muttered, with a little gaucherie, that 'he looked upon the House of Lords as a most important breakwater.'

'Nothing like the march of Time for taking the priggishness out of people. Well, if you undertake this post, I shall look to you to help me with my correspondence and my literary work. I have a good deal of that. I produce an article in the rough, and expect it to be polished for me, and put into form. You see, when one is expected to say something, and is not particularly fertile in ideas oneself—a little stale, if I may put it so—it is a decided advantage to have a secretary who is more productive—well, perhaps that's not the right way of putting it—more practised at that sort of thing.'

'And does the world talk about your articles?' asked Godfrey, facing a fresh conscientious difficulty, one which he knew had to be evaded by most hack-writers in London.

'No—it's only intimate friends who know

much about it. I wait to get the right knack before confessing my identity. I want to get influence—there is no influence like that of journalism—to have a newspaper of one's own; a project which I have talked of more than once—is a means of impressing one's opinions on tens of thousands of the people.'

CHAPTER VI.

In less than a week Godfrey was hard at work as the secretary of his old friend. It seemed to the astonished Charles that he worked tremendously, neglecting nothing which industry could accomplish, shirking not the smallest item. That this man of shrinking nerve, who was not ashamed to proclaim himself the son of a labourer, should not only know more about politics than Mr. Lloyd himself, but should be able to say it still in the most fitting words, after living so long among the people, seemed sometimes to be a little marvellous.

Charlie had had a secret suspicion that the 'penny-a-lining' must have destroyed the refinement of his secretary's style. But, when

he brought what he called 'his own ideas' in the rough to Godfrey over-night, he was pretty certain to receive by the morrow's noon a composition which no more resembled the old rags that he had hastily thrown together than the delicate white paper which has passed through the last process of the paper-mill resembles the pulp. Godfrey winced when his new employer praised him. What could Charlie know of the number of those manuscripts which had vanished during the last few years as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed them up, and which were possibly reposing still in the lowest depths of editors' waste-baskets?

He felt as if the bloom had been rubbed off all his earlier aspirations, and could only be thankful that, before he knew Mrs. Morton, he had sedulously kept away from the purlieus of some more recognised Bohemians, who did their best to help each other by boozing in public-houses between Temple Bar and Ludgate Hill, recognising the old axiom that water is best, especially when it is plentifully flavoured with brandy. Not even to Charlie could he tell of

the time when the problem of how to live had been very difficult to him, of when his watch had just found its way to the pawnbroker's, and a magnificent diamond ring, the gift of his father, had quickly followed its example.

His new work seemed to him light. It consisted of but five hours a day, three in the morning, and two in the afternoon. By that time Charlie's accounts, as well as his literary matters, and the correspondence which had been more bothering still, were all comfortably disposed of. Indeed, on some days the work was a sinecure, and on those occasions Charlie would ensconce himself in dressing-gown and slippers in his secretary's room, and show himself heartily disposed for a chat.

'You used to take such an interest in class struggles,' he said to him, on one occasion. 'I was half afraid that I should be engaging a demagogue for a secretary; but now you seem to have a new dislike of offending other men's prejudices.'

'I am no longer likely ever to be a capitalist,' answered Godfrey, 'nor am I so certain that I

know all about a great many questions with which I once thought myself well acquainted.'

'But your brother, as you call him, the working-man?'

'I think of him as much as ever. Only I remember the saying to which even Diderôt could assent that there is a worse evil for society than the loss of liberty, and that is the loss of God.'

Both men had much to keep them grave. The brother of the one remained in a critical state, and the other was still cut off from news of his father, if the flying visits of Mr. Lloyd did not supply him with occasional information. After one of these visits, Charlie startled him by the information that Sir Ralph was dead, and that Reuben had behaved like 'a brick,' allowing the daughter of the bankrupt man undisputed possession of the house and park.

'Ah, I doubt if you ever did justice to that father of yours. Harsh nerves without which a man could never have lived such a wearing life—three days of such knocking about would have jarred most men into idiocy—lead to harsh words; but, bless you, he never meant

them. He is prose itself, he had not the nature to comprehend you—but his feelings are strong as iron; he'll have his grip on you still.'

Godfrey was silent.

But when a year had passed, and spring was coming again, his life, which was now a tolerably happy one and evenly-balanced, was disturbed by the following exclamation,

'Who do you think has been in town? I did not tell him *you* were here. But if you do your duty there'll be a lot for you to see about. Mr. Sellwood has no more idea of conducting an election on a decent, new-fashioned basis than Johnnie Gilpin had of riding.'

'*My father!*—what, Mr. Sellwood?' repeated Godfrey, in bewilderment, and suspecting Charlie of being again engaged in a plot.

'Yes, it's not altogether a bad notion,' said Charlie, considering with apparent attention the pattern on his plate. (For the men now generally lunched together, and Charlie was kindness personified to his secretary.)

Godfrey sat staring at him. He did not take the notion in.

'Come,' continued his patron, a little impatiently, 'you're nearly thirty years old—or is it thirty-one. You're not behindhand in your politics—you wouldn't suit me, if you were. And you will quite understand that, as there is a talk of a coming election, some of the Torringmoor folk, who are more go-ahead than the rest of them, would like to have the place freed from the thraldom of Toryism—not that your father knew whether he was a Tory or not,' and here Charlie began to laugh.

'I told him that as a rule when candidates mean to solicit the suffrages of a constituency it is generally necessary to toss up and make up their minds beforehand whether they shall wear the orange or the blue. But come, this will give him an opportunity for settling some of your burning questions. He'll fall into everything that you suggest,' said the future Lord Newderry, stifling his laughter.

'I don't understand,' began Godfrey.

'Oh, wait, I am coming to it—all in good time. You know your father is immensely improved. I have the profoundest respect for

him—I assure you I have. But I will confess that I was just a little taken aback when Mrs. Austin wrote at the request of Miss Rashleigh to make the startling announcement that Mr. Sellwood meant to go into Parliament. It seems that he has been invited to come forward by the local Liberal Association. But I doubt if he knows the difference between one party or the other. Bearing that in mind, I wrote back to her to tell him that it was immensely good of him, but that I should object to his being kept on his legs for the amusement of the roughs, and that I had too much respect for his constitution to like to see him deprived of his natural sleep.'

'Well?'

'Well, you may depend upon it he is not the man, when he has made up his mind, to shilly-shally, or let the grass grow under his feet. And it seems that a Mr. Tatham, whose family has owned the seat for two generations back has offended some of the Torringmoor folk by seeming to count on a perpetuity of tenure, and they are anxious to get rid of the present in-

cumbent—or cumberer of the ground. All this is an opportunity which your father will not let slip. Down comes Mr. Sellwood by the next train, with a persistent idea that an abundance of spare cash always put out to usury will be sure to weigh heavily in his favour. Now the comfort is he is not of feeble fibre. But he has got wrong notions into his head about five-pound notes, and flags which are illegal, except, I suppose, in churches—he'll want drums next—to say nothing of tea and sweetmeats.'

'Had we not better go on with what we are doing; I don't know how all this talk will help my father?' asked Godfrey again, pallid as at his first interview with Lloyd.

'I'm coming to it as fast as my breath will let me. Well, when your father shows himself in town, his object is *this*. He says he takes the liberty of coming to me because he thinks I might know some gentleman of experience who will manage his affairs as a candidate. He says he wishes to do the thing handsomely, and therefore, whoever will come down as his friend

will be magnificently paid I make no doubt, but for certain reasons I advised him not to state the sum.'

'Thank you,' said Godfrey, quietly—his eyes were cast down, and his hands had a firm grasp of the table.

'Now, you know he is already inviting burgesses wholesale to dine with him. He is much struck by the notion that the thing is to be done by money, and—to be honest with you—if he is to keep within prohibited limits, it is only his own son who will dare to hint at the existence of a scruple.'

There was a glass of water on the table. Godfrey raised it and put it to his lips. Then he asked, with apparent indifference,

'And you think that it is—a lady—who is tempting him to this?'

'Yes, she has reason to be grateful to him, he has been generous to her. But it is like skating on thin ice for Miss Rashleigh to try to interfere with him. She says it will be a good thing to turn his thoughts. He has never been the same man since you left him. But you see

a woman does not appreciate as well as we do the danger of corrupting the electors.'

'What do you advise me to do?'

'Accept this engagement—you will be beholden to him for nothing—you can take up your quarters in another house if it please you. But go and take care of him. It is your manifest duty. I had nobody else to recommend but you. And you know there is no occasion to put *you* through your facings.'

There was again a pause.

'A man who can write short articles or paragraphs for the papers seems to him especially desirable.'

'But I could never puff him in my paragraphs.'

'Well, you'll put it all straight. Explain that to him yourself. It's no good beating about the bush. I'll write and tell him that you'll go down.'

'And you?' said Godfrey, raising his eyes.

'Oh, *I*. I expect to be summoned to poor Greville any day. Then all my affairs will be different.'

'Ah! you are throwing your bait again with the certainty that the fish will rise—you have been considering how you can patch up the quarrel between myself and my father, skilfully humouring the pride of both. It is good of you, but you must give me a few hours to think,' answered the other as he rose to his feet.

He wanted to be alone, and to talk to Mrs. Morton.

PART VII.

I am so tired,
If I would comfort me, I know not how,
For I have seen thee, lad, as I desired,
And I have nothing left to long for now.

We two, that had so many things to say,
So many hopes to render clear,
And they are all gone after thee, my dear.

JEAN INGELOW.

If thou art rich, thou'rt poor,
For when in age, whose back with ingots bound,
Thou bear'st thy heavy riches but a journey,
And Death unloadeth thee.

SHAKESPEARE.

CHAPTER I.

It was on one of the last mornings in March 1880, when the sun was shining after a slight shower, the cocks crowing, and the little birds with wet wings beginning to sing, that Godfrey—sparing a few minutes from the absorbing business for which he had returned to Torringmoor—found his way to the old gate of Rashleigh Park. Godfrey, who had not seen the venerable trees and the ancient greensward for years, felt as if the antiquity of the place gave it an added beauty. He thought of the stuffy smell of Piccadilly, Pall Mall, and even the Park with a contempt which would have been ungracious but a few days before, as he breathed in the fresh ozone and odour of moist earth.

The forsaken aspect of the place seemed to invest it with the deeper serenity of Nature. He was in a humour to be pleased. Coquettish April was heralding her approach, and just touching with her lightest tints of green the branches of an antique avenue of trees, the arches of which looked like Gothic vaults. The 'wandering voice' of the cuckoo, redoubling its initial note, was not heard as yet, but any day, if the wind were to shift, it might come ringing merrily and sharply through the air, and gushes of wild-bird music seemed to tell every now and then of the exquisite joy of the coming spring.

'Can anyone fail to be glad on such a morning?' Godfrey asked himself, in his new delight. Reconciled as he was to his father, through the skilful ruse of that good friend Charlie Lloyd (who would have given him credit for such a stroke of diplomacy?), and with every prospect of success in the election—which was rapidly to take place before there was time for the Torringmoor people to rake up stories against Reuben—could there be anything more

delightful than this relief from imprisonment in a great city. With life no longer a war waged against the great tyrant Necessity, who crushes our ideals and lays his chilly hands on our enthusiasms, and with his father's opinions now more in unison with his own—owing, as he sometimes thought, to that suffering which had seemed at the time to be almost hopeless in its uses—Godfrey felt as if his highest aspirations might after all be satisfied, and was elated by the hope that not only might he be able in some simple, unambitious, and unobtrusive fashion to realise his dream of helping hundreds of his fellows in their moral and physical destitution, but that pure, domestic happiness might after all be his.

He felt as if he had gone through a little wholesome depression from which he had risen emboldened and not weakened in love for the brotherhood. Flowers there might be in London in abundance, raised by skilful market-gardeners to smile in uncongenial scenes. But they had not the poetry of *these* flowers. He remembered where they all grew in summer

—myosotis, moneywort, and golden-rod. He never recollected to have seen so many wild flowers in the fields—lifting up their radiant heads unassailed by the scythe of the mower—as there were at Rashleigh in the month of June. And just at present no one seemed to disturb primroses, Lent-lilies, marsh-marigolds, and wood-anemones. Perhaps it was because no one was rich enough to disturb them. He smiled to himself.

'How the utilitarian tastes of most rich people would lead them to neglect nothing which would deprive this place of its picturesqueness and grandeur. Those magnificent old chestnuts would be trimmed till they had lost the graceful droop of the lower branches, and the upward spring of the higher ones.'

A few steps further on he hesitated.

'I'm making a fool of myself, and can scarcely spare the time. But I can't for the life of me keep away from the house.'

A man passed him on his way from the private garden. Was it Godfrey's fancy that he stared at him blankly?

'If she is not alone—if there should be anyone else with her?' he asked himself, with another sort of shock.

The clock from the turret of the old stable struck nine. A purple shadow passed over the distant view of the moor. He glanced at it, with the river like a silver ribbon meandering, and thought—with that sort of pang which he had always found it hard to prevent—of that part of the old Rashleigh grounds which his father had appropriated, but which Vere loved so tenderly. There the stream which fed the river, on a moist day like this, would be bounding in capricious leaps from stone to stone, from boulder to boulder, singing its own little song of triumph.

He wished for a moment that he had appointed the interview there, and then pulled himself up.

'No; it would have been taking unfair advantage of her. There are sentimental associations connected with the place. It is best for both of us to forget them.'

He was near the house by this time, and

could see the windows garlanded by the passion flower, always more or less in leaf. He could distinguish the brilliant colour of clumps of yellow jonquil, and tulips thickly blooming in the flower-beds, and even the undulation of a red curtain at one of the windows.

His sensitive shyness about women—a shyness which he had not yet conquered, though he had often reproached himself for losing an opportunity by excessive bashfulness—caused him instinctively to draw back, and stand screened for a few moments by a bank of evergreens. For at that instant a girl, very slender in figure, and of rather less than middle height, in a light-grey dress with a black sash, and a large hat with black feathers and ribbons, came down the steps of the house. She was wearing a heavy, fur-lined mantle, from the folds of which she seemed to be desirous to escape. For directly she had tripped past the immediate vicinity of the windows, she tore off both cloak and hat, and stood revealed in a puffed and gathered artistic costume, displaying the perfect lines of the tiny figure, and crowned with black,

curly hair, on which the sunlight played, lighting up the neat little head, with its double rows of fringe crisped, twisted, or tortured into shapes which might have rivalled the locks of the Medusa, only in this case they were so diminutive. The 'back hair,' as our grandmothers used to call it, had been clipped away. The lowered eyelids had long, black lashes sweeping the cheek, the complexion was dark, but clear and healthy, the outline of the mouth delicate, but a little pouting.

She walked slowly, as if she found something melancholy in the place. Her hands hung down in a meditative attitude which was evidently unusual with her. In another moment she began to sing. She had a voice, but it was almost drowned by the warbling of the birds. She was approaching the turn of the road where she would come upon Godfrey. Without more ceremony he advanced, holding out both his hands in cordial greeting.

It was prosaic, but this little woman was terribly afraid of live stock, pigs, or cows. She had even been known to run away from a

turkey, and the rural habits of the people in this part of the country—with the poverty which caused many fences to be unmended in this neglected park—led her to associate a footstep with something that might be alarming. It was an illogical fear; but when a girl is given to tremors of this sort it is rarely that she thinks of anything logical. And the Lilliputian feet were already trampling wildly on the flower-beds—where it did not seem to Godfrey that they could inflict any great amount of mischief—when she saw the stranger following her, raising his hat.

'Don't you know me—little Dorothy?' he asked, with some emotion in his voice.

The girl receded a few steps. There was an expression of offended dignity on the face which made him hasten to remedy his mistake.

'Will you forgive me for calling you by your Christian name?'

She examined him without answering, mentally cataloguing the advantages and disadvantages of the figure before her. A man still young, with a complexion which told of delicacy,

expressive features, and a few lines on the forehead—of light build and somewhat thin. The whole physique was unusual, especially as the colouring was so fair, and the hair almost flaxen. She did not remember ever seeing anyone exactly like him before, and perhaps he was the 'something which might happen.' She hated the life which she had been forced to lead since her return to Rashleigh Park, and was always waiting for the 'something.'

'My name is Dorothea Henrietta—a most abominable name; but in Paris they called me Henriette,' she answered, with a look of humour lurking in the flexible corners of her mouth.

'I prefer Dorothy to Henriette,' he said, smiling. 'You used to be Dot when you were my little sister—do you remember it at all?'

She stood silent, her eyes wide open with surprise.

The years, for the first time in his experience, seemed to thrust themselves into disagreeable prominence, as he stood waiting for her answer.

'*Que voulez-vous?*' she said, at last, with a

shrug. And he wished they had not sent her to a French school.

'Let us talk English—you are eighteen?'

'And four months.'

He smiled.

'You were ten years old when I saw you last. I used to carry you on my shoulder. You went to sleep in my arms.'

It was the prettiest little expression which came into the astonished velvety eyes now, the most charming rose-tint on the smooth young cheek, and she tapped one tiny foot impatiently on the gravel. He felt so old, and had lost so many illusions during those dreary years in London, that he could not help smiling again, and thinking of the enchanted land of Oberon and Titania. Did Shakespeare plan his 'Midsummer Night's Dream' after an experience of ugly lodgings, or London coffee-taverns? Did it save him from melancholy? So little was known about Shakespeare that all theories were possible.

Henriette woke him from his reverie. The little flute-like voice was saying,

'But *you*—you were not like this then.'

'Nevertheless, I am the same man. Has your cousin heard of my return? I thought of taking her by surprise. Has she—has she—ever—mentioned—me to you?'

It was a difficult question to get out, for, though Godfrey had conquered his shyness, he had awkward recollections about the past.

Henriette's varying face, reflecting—small as it was—every passing change like a landscape under our varying English sky, had spoken for her before she said, in a puzzled moment in which she could think of no ready answer,

'Why should she mention you? She is not young enough to talk about things. Besides, you know——'

She stopped, and rushes of colour suddenly flooded both face and neck.

'Well, you see, when a girl is fixed in one groove, and when things have become a little out of date and old-fashioned, and when one is obliged to grind down servants—well, not exactly that, perhaps, but she works as hard as any of them herself,' explained Dot, lapsing

suddenly from the indefinite to the definite—'you can't wonder if her ideas get a little severe.'

The perplexed expression of the girl's face made him feel sorry for her.

'It is a pity,' he ventured, 'if you are not happy together.'

'Oh, we are *so* different! I am always trying to keep quiet like her, and not to grumble. She talks to me, you know, about the misfortunes which bloom as thickly as daisies for a repining mind—there, look at them; we have enough in all conscience on our lawn' (he could not help noticing how deftly and expressively she used her hands); 'but ah-h' (it was something of a French interjection), 'it is *triste* here—I have *migraine* half the time. She calls it retirement—*I* call it stagnation.'

'After all, I prefer the daisies on the lawn to closely-shaven baldness,' answered Godfrey, with an impulse to help.

He could not have told how or why, but a sadness had crept into his voice, the spring morning had clouded over, the birds had ceased

to sing. The *naiveté* of these childish confidences, the freshness of the little unoccupied heart, would have been charming enough in themselves, if they had not suggested a vague sort of shadow. Was it possible that solitude and misfortune could have petrified a character like Vere's. He had a horror of women who were hard.

'But your cousin?' he began, intending some sort of rehabilitation of his ideal.

'Oh, don't tell her of my nonsense. She prides herself on avoiding exaggeration of sentiment; she does not like me to read novels which excite my sensibility.'

It did not escape Godfrey's notice that she said 'sensibility' like a Frenchwoman, and that there was just a touch of the shrew in the manner in which the little forehead was puckered up, and the pretty foot stamped the ground.

'There are novels and novels,' he suggested, gravely, 'just as there are women and women.'

'*Yes*,' she answered, her conscience smiting her a little as she remembered the demoralising

sensational romances, which she herself in her better moments heartily despised, but which she had smuggled into the house in their cheap paper covers, adorned with ghastly pictures, awful to look at. 'I don't mean to say it's Vere's fault—she's without a fault, perfection, and she's made the maids a good deal like her —"careful training," don't they call it? They are all too good here,' she added, with a sigh; 'it would be nice to do something awfully wicked for a change.'

'You think goodness monotonous?'

'A little dull and flat—don't you sometimes?'

'You'd like to vary it by a mountain of some sort?'

'No—now you're laughing at me.'

This spontaneous young creature, who had so many new ideas and so many unsatisfied longings, was a new revelation to Godfrey.

'Not laughing at you at all,' he answered, as he looked a little wistfully towards the house. 'I ought to have heard all this before; but I might as well have been at the Antipodes, so little have I heard of old friends.'

There was a cloud on his brow. The conversation, which had taken but two or three minutes, had somehow damped the buoyancy of his spirits.

Her eye instantly grew bright and keen. He was ashamed of feeling that he shrank from their inspection—he who was no longer a boy, and ought to be able to endure their inquisition.

She recognised for the first time that he was visibly agitated, and tried not to appear surprised. She thought it odd that he took her hand, and did not look her in the face.

His own hand trembled, and she had no longer any desire to babble her silly little confidences.

'Come, I mustn't keep you talking,' she said; 'I will go and call Vere.'

And, with no further warning, she fled from him, half terrified.

'It can't be always *now*—surely something is going to happen. I couldn't live long in a dry way like this,' she repeated to herself, as she flew rapidly over the lawn.

CHAPTER II.

VERE found herself forced to act a part for one of the first times in her life when, a few minutes afterwards, the little head poked itself in at the door.

The effort to keep disappointment and anxiety out of her voice made it almost sharp as she said,

'Oh! dear child, is it not understood between us that I am not to see visitors in business hours?'

The elder girl liked intervals of solitude, perhaps because she had accustomed herself to them. It seemed to her she had no possible right to consume any inordinate amount of other people's time. And, since her uncle's

death, she had used herself often to sit alone in the study or to superintend in the kitchen.

'It is thanks to Mr. Sellwood's charity,' she sometimes said to herself, 'that I am able to keep to a little corner of God's earth, and do my best to make it green and bright.'

She would not have accepted the charity for herself, but she reminded herself that Henriette was of a delicate nature, suffering from all sorts of minor things which, to people of stronger nerves, could not be called by the name of ills. It was a misfortune, an hysterical malady. Vere had a slight contempt for it which she never allowed herself to show.

'We two are alone,' she had said to her cousin, on the first day when she had welcomed her from Paris. 'We must try to make each other happy, and help one another.'

She had heard that Godfrey was in the village, but had not spoken of it to Henriette. To do so, she knew from sad experience, would be to have her private affairs blazoned about the place. She had been certain, as she said to herself, that Godfrey would return some day,

and that he would find she had been faithful to the trust which he had confided to her.

'He's a wretched cynic,' people had been accustomed to say of Reuben; 'he talks as if he did not believe in anything in heaven or earth.'

But she had been able to answer, quietly and proudly,

'He believes in a good deal more than he lets people think; he is no cynic at all. What, for instance, should *we* have done without him?'

The constant thought of the trust which had been confided to her, and the care which she had had to give to two somewhat morose old men had made her seem a little older than her years. She had led a home-spun, monotonous sort of life, with passions suspended in the solitude which had been enforced. She had feared even to trust herself to the power of the imagination, or to allow herself to picture the first meeting after a separation of years. Sometimes, in spite of this, she had caught herself rehearsing the very words she and Godfrey would be likely to say to each other.

But alas for the difference between fancy and reality! When, wearied with her account-books, Vere had got up to look through the window—a minute or two before her sister ran in to call her—had she not seen this apparition of her dreams?—the man who had been expected for eight long years—aged and paled, just as she had pictured him? No—could it be he?—standing in a nonchalant attitude, listening to the confidences of the talkative Henriette? Did her imagination mislead her?

In the solitude in which no one saw her, she forgot for a few moments the ink which had soiled her fingers, the fair hair which was unusually rough, and the rusty crape of her somewhat neglected black dress, shining in folds where it had been turned. She made no effort to prepare herself, only endeavouring to control herself when she received Henriette's message, and advancing with the dignity which he remembered in the days of old.

'Godfrey,' she said, meeting him with her hands outstretched, and standing at the door in the full light of the ruthless sun, which just

then had emerged with brightness from a cloud, and was searching every line and every deficiency in her face.

Had not Sir Ralph foreseen years before that the glory of Vere's colouring was likely to be evanescent, and that the features were not regular enough to satisfy a sculptor? Well—what of that? In the heat and burden of the day the flowers are not as bright as in the early dew of the morning. There was nothing in her countenance to make her shrink from loving scrutiny. She was aware, though not in any morbid way, of the changes in it. But as she stood bare-headed, with premature lines on the fair, broad brow, and the sun shining down on her flaxen head, there was no sign that her heart was throbbing violently, except an added pallor, which was strangely unbecoming.

It was, somehow, not exactly the meeting which the man had imaged to himself. Do not such meetings almost always seem to disappoint us after our imaginings? The glamour seemed for the moment to have vanished, as if a cold hand were clutching his heart, and

the cold were extending in some strange way to his whole body.

Were little Henriette's insinuations real? Could it be possible that the woman who had once refused him—partly from pride and the fear of humiliation—had become in the course of years cautious and disdainful? Could he offer himself again to one who was ready to repel advances, and who, if he married her, might prove an iceberg? Vere, pale with emotion, with her lips colourless and trembling, dress neglected, and hair rough, scarcely realised his anticipations; whilst all the time there was something unexpected in his gaze which arrested her, and stifled the cry of her yearning heart. Etiquette forbade her to question him about his past, whilst it did not seem natural for him to address her, as he had intended, with words of tenderness, thanking her for the change which she had effected in his father, and asking her to be the mistress of his hearth and the realisation of his ideal.

Priding herself on her presence of mind, and with one of those quick deductions which

women are always ready to draw, she recognised, or thought she recognised, a change of feeling in him, and talked, if not as rapidly as Henriette, with as much *aplomb*.

'When the election is over, you must give yourself a rest,' she said. 'Mr. Sellwood can't do without you now.'

'Any poor man would be glad of the engagement. I am promised a bonus, if he succeeds or not.'

'Why keep up that pretext?'

'What pretext?'

'That you are a poor man.'

'I never wish to be rich.'

'Is there not a little defiance in that?'

'I do not know how the money was made.'

'You should trust your father. It is scarcely likely that he will wish to surrender the project of his life. You are quite young still. You should accept thankfully the goods with which the gods provide you.'

She was thinking, as usual, principally of others, though she felt ruffled and uneasy. This sudden arrival had shaken her, and de-

prived her of her boasted strength. She could not tell that he was chafing at the veil of womanly reserve in which, as usual, she had shrouded herself, and that—intimidated and discouraged from the fear of placing her in a fresh dilemma—he was losing a second opportunity of speaking out. For the mere pleasure of seeing him again and talking to him was beginning to thaw the frigidity, which had been only apparent. A sort of happiness, which seemed to bless rather than to expect to be blessed, stole over her, and was a great beautifier.

'You joke! I am on the shady side of thirty,' he exclaimed.

A smile wreathed itself over her face.

'No, I don't. Some of us grow old quickly. Others are like Rip Van Winkle.'

'I am very much honoured, but I am quite unable to accept the compliment.'

With a quick sense of delicacy he had detected her consciousness of the change in herself, and would have liked to have told her how *he* had suffered—how it was as though his soul

had been bruised, and he felt the bruises all over.

'She is like a glacier,' he had said to himself at first.

But now he saw the Raffaelesque resignation in the face which he had too easily fancied to be severe and denunciatory.

'Was the child right?' he had asked himself, in terror a moment before, alarmed at the look of blank stoniness in the dear face. But now the old expression had returned with the self-forgetful smile, and he hated himself for the momentary suspicion. It did not make matters better that she seemed already to take it for granted that he had been fascinated by her little cousin.

'Is she not pretty?' she asked, when Dot left them. 'I fear it seems rather a hard, colourless life for her here. Her father's death came at last somewhat unexpectedly, but quite calmly. He had been so used to lingering illness. And, had it not been for the goodness of *your* father, it would have been hard for us to live.'

Godfrey did not answer. He was thinking

of how terrible it would have been if either of these women had been condemned to suffer from actual privation, and he felt as if his father could not have acted otherwise.

'You know there is no male heir, and nothing for anyone to inherit,' she continued, with a smile which showed that she could be still her frank, bright-spirited self. 'Your father could have turned us out.'

'Impossible—he speaks of how much he owes you.'

'We were both much alone, and we helped each other.'

'He does nothing but sing your praises.'

'There was a time when he seemed to hate me.'

A recollection rose before her as she uttered the words of the lonely, desolate man, eating his own heart out with bitterness and regret, who was said to be dangerously ill soon after his son had left him. He had refused to allow anyone but the housekeeper to nurse him, and when Mrs. Rose was worn out with her task, and with the surliness of her master, Vere had

begged her to allow her to come and help her. She had taken Reuben by surprise when he, waking from a nap one day, had discovered her sitting by his side, laden with flowers, which she had brought to propitiate him, and looking as if she had brought the sunshine with her. She left him no time to swear at her, for she began singing softly directly the sick man woke, and at first he was inclined to wonder if his disbelief in apparitions was incorrect after all. But when she explained to him with tears that she was sorry to have been the cause of his misfortune, and asked if she might read to him, as she was accustomed to read to her uncle, he gave an unwilling consent. All this returned to her memory, but she did not speak of it.

She drew the conversation again to Henriette, and seemed rather pleased than otherwise that Godfrey had already made acquaintance with her.

'It is a little hard that she should be condemned to this hermit-like existence,' she said. 'You must talk to her and help to de-

velop her. I know how little she has to amuse her here, and it has been duller than usual since my uncle's death. But if one could get fresh interests for her!'

'I asked her if she recollected how I used to carry her in my arms. But it would be absurd to suppose that she could remember such a thing through all these years.'

'I have no doubt she remembers,' she answered, with an effort at composure which accounted for the coldness of her voice, and which succeeded so well that she could meet the man's earnest gaze without flinching.

To all appearance she was neither depressed nor ill at ease, and, when he asked if she—as well as Henriette—never chanced to find it dull, she said, quickly, in the tone of a person who had determined to be cheerful, and wished at the same time to cut inquiries short,

'I am sure it must be my own fault if I am not contented.'

She had kept her arms close to her sides, as if she would oblige herself to keep from gesture, and her hands were trembling with the re-

straint which she had put on herself in such a way that she became aware of it as soon as he had gone.

She had left the French gesticulation to Henriette, but it was only afterwards that she knew how at the first she had spoken calmly and even coldly, and had stood before him like a statue.

'I must have seemed unsympathetic,' she thought, plunging her face and neck into a basin of cold water a few minutes afterwards, that she might rally all her self-command. 'It was a pity, but I would rather seem unsympathetic than appear to be the victim of an unrequited passion.'

She caught sight of her face in the glass, and for once sat down before it counting the wrinkles which were slowly coming, the lines, and the marks of care.

'I am not thirty yet; but my uncle looked older than he was before he died, I remember. Some women grow older sooner than others, and happiness might have made me younger,' she thought, with something like a sigh, as, for the

first time, she noted with disapproval that, even when she had brushed her hair smoothly, there was a geometrical correctness about the old-fashioned bands, and a precision in the stern cut of her dress, including the neatness of the collar, which was likely to be somewhat irritating to the artist mind.

It dawned upon her, as she rested her chin on her hand, and listened to the water flowing in a brooklet near her window, hastening to join the stream in the wilderness—where already marsh-marigold and wild Lent-lilies were blooming—that it would be possible for her to wear her hair in a curly fringe like Henriette, and to let her neck peep from soft ruffling destitute of hard lines. Had she not passed eight years in waiting, and nobody had heard her murmur? Then, with the child-like generosity with which she had ever been ready to surrender the best which life could give her to others, she thought how much more suitable it would be that Godfrey should marry Sir Ralph's daughter. Her conscience, that pitiless repeater of hard truths, whispered,

'Is she not younger and prettier than you, and more at an age when luxuries are required? Did you not give him great cause of offence? Did you not speak to him in a way which no man would be likely to forget, and will you deck yourself out to allure him now? And would it be possible for you to supply Henriette with sashes and lace, and yet spend the money on yourself? Are you not the weaker of the two to think of such a thing? Let the girl have her chance.'

CHAPTER III.

GODFREY was so occupied with his father's affairs that he was able to spare but a short time on the following day to present himself again at the Park. He was anxious for another private interview with Henriette—not so much because he had been disenchanted by her revelations, as because a quiet dread had risen up in his mind which seemed to him to account for the coldness of his reception.

'Her cousin will tell me; she volunteers everything, and it will be better for me to know,' he said to himself.

It was earlier than before when he ventured into the Park, rather before nine o'clock. He had important work at ten.

Henriette was already in the garden, scissors in hand, gathering some flowers.

'How early you are!'

She made a little *moue*.

'You have no curfew-bell—you others—ten o'clock at night—we keep humdrum hours.'

'I have been thinking of what you said yesterday.'

She drew herself up.

'I don't know whether I ought to have said all that—I have never known a mother—it is true—but I talk too fast.'

The *naïveté* of the confession was like the rest of her character. For some cause or other, she was on her guard.

'It was you who talked of your cousin's future. You made me think——'

He stopped before he could finish the sentence; for men do not like to question women. And, though it had struck him that Vere had already given some sort of pledge to his friend in the days when Charlie's prospects had been little more promising than his own—an explanation which

seemed to account for Lloyd's unwillingness to talk on the subject—it was not possible to approach the subject.

'Common-sense is uninteresting, and so is the dull lichen which dull lives are supposed to contract, the damp moss forcing itself over the very roots of life, and threatening to strangle them,' he thought, a little hopelessly, as he looked at the mossgrown trees around him, and ventured to ask,

'Does your cousin ever weary of this place as you do?'

Henriette laughed convulsively.

'How can she weary, when it is "duty," "duty" with her all the time?' she queried in her turn, with one of her Parisian shrugs. 'Why, she has no time to sit still and weep. What is it the poet said,

"Men must work, and women must weep."'

'Kingsley only introduced that bit of false sentiment into a ballad. He was the last man to speak of it as true,' he said, quietly.

'Well, it is "work," or whatever you call it,

which seems to haunt her all day, as if she were haunted by a sin.'

'I might have known that she was likely to prefer self-immolation to vulgar ambition,' he said to himself. Then aloud, 'But she has friends?'

'Ah yes'—a little archly. 'Who told you? There is a story to that effect. They say that her pride was wounded by some one when she was older than I am now, and that that prevents her from marrying—though they do say she has a friend. I know, if I had one, I would make him come here, and cheer us up a bit. Women stagnate without men. I suppose she writes to him sometimes; at least, Mrs. Austin writes.'

She had said little—nothing at all, as she declared to herself, when she afterwards thought of it, but there was a subtle divination in the man's mind which made him guess more.

'I hope I have not hurt you,' cried Henriette, surprised into naturalness by the concentrated look on the thin, pale face.

'Oh no—there is nothing wrong. I am not

easily hurt,' answered Godfrey, sharply awakened from his reverie, and puzzling her more than ever by his answer.

The sound of voices reached Vere, who was busied in the kitchen, and she hastened out in curiosity as to election news.

She had suffered during the night, and suffering is no beautifier. More than ever Godfrey deplored the fact that the radiant possibilities about her seemed to have been checked. If she were engaged to his prosperous patron, why should the shadow of self-sacrifice seem to have fallen on her? How could he guess that the look which he thought strange on her face was the look of a woman who had determined to face the consequences of her own mistake, and who was not one to succumb hopelessly to circumstances.

She met him with a smile, which it cost her much to wear, but which at the moment seemed to prove her indifference to him. She wore a large apron over her dress, a bunch of solemn-looking keys by her side, and seemed to have been giving out the grocery stores. As fate

would have it, a diversion was created just as she stepped out from the flagged floor of the kitchen to welcome the couple, whom she had again seen in the distance, but whom she had not liked to interrupt.

Some cocks and hens had found their way into the scullery, and the maids were busily engaged in driving them out. Henriette was again convulsed with laughter, and Godfrey found it hard not to follow her example. Vere smiled.

'We are very primitive, because we are poor. You laugh at me,' she said, in a low voice. 'I think our ancestors would laugh. I make myself ridiculous with this house-keeping.'

'Oh, it is cruel to drive them about—I can't bear to see creatures suffer,' cried Henriette, recovering from her laughter.

Vere looked at her in silence, knowing well that this was a little piece of false sentimentality, but not caring to expose her cousin's love of acting. Unconsciously the slight hardness crept again into her voice.

'Dramatic heroines would not be able to make simple pastry,' she said, with a little

laugh; 'but—I must send you all away,' and she displayed her flour-covered arms.

'Ah, you see it is her element, home and domestic pursuits, and all that—they are not my element at all.'

A few minutes afterwards Vere joined the two who were strolling round the house, and they found themselves suddenly in front of the older part of the castle, which had still a proud air, as if vain of its antique beauty.

'You have nothing like it in *your* grounds,' said Henriette, a little defiantly.

'No, it is so good of Mr. Sellwood to let us stay here,' answered Vere, in the low tones which seemed to have become habitual to her.

'I cannot thank you enough for the change in him; I find it out more day by day.'

'I only drew out what was there already, concealed from most people, but he has plenty of good feeling and much ability.'

'With *you* must rest the merit of the discovery.'

'I believe in all my fellow-creatures,' she answered, as she opened the door of her own

private sitting-room, and said, looking at Henriette as well as at Godfrey, 'You can come in here as frequently as you please—you can amuse yourselves as you like. No one will interrupt you, and I am quiet myself. Those are my uncle's as well as my father's books. Choose when this election-time is over. It is not a bad library,' she added, when Godfrey did not answer.

It was the retreat of a woman of culture. Fragments of old tapestry, pieces of old armour, and furniture of old oak saved from the ruins of the castle, flowers, birds, shells, china, all were here, besides a harp and a piano.

As she sat down on one of the low chairs (for they had breakfasted already, and Godfrey was hastening back to his father), he could not help recalling Reuben's words of the preceding night.

'She is no longer quite as fresh as in her early girlhood, but she is one of the best and most charming women I know.'

'How much she and I would have had in common—what a marriage it would have been

to have added to one's *growth!'* Godfrey thought to himself with a pang as he feared it was not to be.

The fine simplicity which he had always admired in her character had not been at all impaired by time, and a nature which could rise above the melancholy caused by endurance and solitude, remaining always bright and helpful when others might have failed, was as much as ever to his taste. But, as far as he knew, she was not free to accept him now. Every moment when he was with her he blamed himself for being intrusive, reminding himself that he must not allow himself to think of her.

With Godfrey, when she next met him, she was perfectly friendly and unembarrassed, shaking off her awkwardness of the first meeting, and allowing him to see—now that she was no longer unnerved or distraught—the true nobility and beauty of her character. It did not seem to be possible to mix up thoughts of jealousy with such a woman. Pettinesses, meannesses, and small irritations about trifles seemed to have been cast out of her nature.

Once more he was inclined to say of her that she could be as self-possessed as any man without the weaknesses of an exacting nature.

Torringmoor was now distracted with all the excitement of the election. And Vere—conservative by family tradition and education, yet feeling as if she knew little more about some of the political questions at stake than if she were a baby in arms—remained at home as much as possible. It was Henriette who was constantly out in the neighbourhood, shaking hands genially with Godfrey's friends, and forgetful of the interests of her father's old ally—whom she readily enough classified as a 'horrid fogey'—wishing Reuben Sellwood a pleasant and successful time of it. Henriette even undertook to do a little private canvassing amongst the cottagers in the neighbourhood, and appealed to the working men, taking their hands and looking at them with earnest eyes, which made their hearts beat faster, for she at least had no troublesome conscientious scruples to worry her. At home she was dull and restless, would not see guests, would not read her

usual novels, would not go out in the spring sunshine, which was tempting and bright, unless it were to walk to Torringmoor, would not sing her little songs, was somewhat cross, and more than a little absent.

Vere seldom put any constraint on the movements of her cousin, not supposing that there were lions prowling about in that quiet neighbourhood ready to devour young girls. Yet she felt a little weighed down with responsibility about Henriette just then, and knew that when the roads were crowded with strange men it was not right for the girl to go about alone without an escort. She watched Henriette all the more anxiously when her offer to accompany her was somewhat irritably refused.

Meanwhile the election for Torringmoor seemed as if it would pass off good-temperedly. The local Liberal Association had invited Reuben to come forward, as likely to be a successful candidate. It was thought probable that he would outbid the Tory where the Tory looked upon himself as chiefly strong, namely, in landed influence, and with this he had to be

taught to combine Liberal views. He would thus have all the advantages of a Conservative and none of the usual disadvantages of the unknown Liberal nominees of the Reform Club, who are most often sent to contest boroughs like Torringmoor.

But Reuben's education in English politics was as yet defective, and, counting on this deficiency, another Liberal had come forward likewise for the borough, and—till Godfrey's introduction on the scene—had appeared likely to divide the honours with Reuben Sellwood. It was a little trying to the latter to find that the introduction of the Ballot Act had diminished the exciting character of the proceedings. Rotten eggs, flour, dead cats and dogs to be showered on the hapless orator of the hustings would have inspired Reuben with a Brutus-like courage. While the suggestion that 'free and independent electors' could not be liberally 'treated,' or that an unmanly 'polling-booth' had to be devised for the secret recording of the votes of weak-kneed voters—who had to creep in like folks who were 'hard-up' and

wanted to pawn their belongings—seemed to him contemptible and disgusting.

'One would think that a British citizen would be proud to exercise his privileges as a freeman,' said Reuben, drawing himself up, in something like his old spirits, after his first meeting with his son.

And as days passed on and the peace of the Torringmoor people was interfered with by nothing approaching a serious disturbance, and when the few acts of violence which are almost inevitable in such contests were reprobated by all parties, it is doubtful if Reuben did not secretly sigh after the good old times when differences of electoral opinion were apt to be settled by hard knocks instead of immaterial argument. In those 'good old times' whole boroughs had been bought and sold, and one or two had actually been disposed of by the 'order of the Court of Chancery.'

Alas for the 'changes 'twixt then and now,' as some one quoted from Coleridge to Reuben, who thought the quotation a good one and repeated it bravely.

In Torringmoor during these few days there was little difference to be noted from the ordinary stagnation, except that a number of people, who generally cared little for politics, had suddenly become mightily enthusiastic. A few of the cynics who regarded an election of this sort as the machinery for a vast chattering-machine, skilfully wound up for special occasions, coveted the deafness of Beethoven, and wished that they also had a cellar into which they could escape from the cackling of unmelodious and loquacious disputants.

In no more providential way could Godfrey have been reconciled to his father. Reuben was happier than he had ever been since his son had left him; smiling to himself and building castles in the air. In fact, he was too happy and too delighted with the clever plan by which Charlie Lloyd had introduced him again to the man of whom he was secretly still as proud as ever—and whom he insisted on calling his 'boy'—to be willing to recall the old subjects of dispute.

Not only were the subjects of dispute really

'bygones,' but in many cases they had actually disappeared—melted into thin air, by the skilful interposition of the gracious woman whose tact had already been exercised upon the uncertain temper of her own disappointed uncle.

'Miss Rashleigh's grandfather paid me a cruel trick, but times were different then. She is extraordinarily capable—very efficient,' remarked Reuben to his wondering son, on the second day after they met.

By this single remark Godfrey saw how he was changed. For never did college coach, high-school teacher, or school-board mistress labour harder at the newest theories of education than Vere had worked during these eight years in developing all that was promising in the character of this hitherto uncultivated man.

She had not only asked leave to read to him as she read to her uncle, but by degrees had introduced him to most of the good English writers. She had so cleverly corrected his errors of speech by repeating after him what he said—as if she attached especial importance to his opinions—and repeating it often in a differ-

ent way, that he had unconsciously adopted the language of better educated people. There was no longer anything to jeer at in Reuben, either in his reticence or his roughness of speech. And though he could not be called an accomplished man of the world, of good birth and recognized antecedents; though he might possibly have been blackballed at some of the more select of the clubs in London, on the whole his promptness, his energy, and his air of decision invested him with an importance which could not be claimed by better born men.

Already he was thinking of his prospective house in town, and stringing together a few glib phrases, in which he no longer made grammatical blunders, when Charlie sent to his assistance the literary gentleman who had promised to render him assistance.

To say that Reuben was astonished when the dog-cart which had been sent to meet the train returned, bringing with it the one being whom he really loved on earth, would be to over-state the fact.

For Charles had prepared him for the sur-

prise. The scheme had not only been devised by his skilful brain, but Reuben had rehearsed for it. In reality he could hardly speak when he saw his 'boy'—his emotions were so overpowering that he had some thoughts of opening a vein, according to the old methods of medical practice, that he might avoid the risk of epilepsy or something worse.

But he had so learnt to control his features that Madame Rachel's victim, when she stepped into the witness box—with her face apparently covered with plaster of Paris, painted pink and white with every appearance of juvenility—did not more skilfully disguise her original self than this apparently matter-of-fact man who attempted to receive his son without an appearance of sentimentality.

Godfrey, who had likewise come prepared, was the more surprised of the two.

Of literature, when they had parted last, with the exception of Shakespeare, Reuben had known nothing; but of politics and public affairs he still knew very little. The explanation was that Miss Rashleigh knew little of these matters herself.

'You must write your address at once,' was the first advice which the son ventured to give him, and which he acted upon immediately.

The two men sat up during the small hours of the night, before both of them were satisfied with this composition.

'Gentlemen,' dictated Reuben, 'the dissolution of this Parliament gives to you and the country at large the opportunity of deciding whether the present government has not made too many mistakes, and missed too many opportunities of fulfilling its duties, to be again entrusted with the reins of power.'

'Reads well for an opening sentence—don't it?' observed Reuben, with a colloquialism of which Vere had not been able to cure him. 'Now we must have something about "peace" and "plenty," — "benefits to the working-classes,"—your old hobby—eh—and all the rest of it?'

'Well, I think it is hardly necessary to begin with a hit at the other party—on the whole, I should not do it,' was the answer of his son.

'Gentlemen,' redictated Reuben, tearing up his other paper, 'Her Majesty's government having advised the Queen to dissolve Parliament, it becomes my duty to solicit—— eh, what next? A hit at the income tax, Afghan and Zulu wars, and all the rest of it——'

Godfrey's head was whirling. His father's native shrewdness was as usual not at fault. Yet with all his keenness he had not discovered that this first meeting after an interval of years was too trying to his son to enable him to think with his usual clearness.

Godfrey tore up the second copy and commenced a simpler form,

'I beg to offer myself as a candidate for the honour of election as one of your representatives in Parliament. Convinced that the welfare of the people will be best favoured by Liberal principles of legislation and government——'

Here he stayed his hand. Speaking figuratively he could not get on his legs at all. What in the name of truth and common-sense *were* his father's opinions about the people?

The drops of moisture stood on his forehead as he remembered the time when he had told this very father that he refused to live on money unjustly wrung from the poor, and when he had said himself,

'If I ever enter Parliament, it will be to devote myself to the cause of the people.'

It was possible that he had judged hardly. If he had to address any man eight years younger than himself under similar circumstances now, he would say to him,

'Wait and think. You are not expected to settle everything in this world. There are many problems which must remain for years unsolved.'

He acknowledged to himself that, after living for years among them, he knew little enough how to remedy all the troubles and difficulties of those who are called the 'lower classes.' Reuben, who had had no peep into these innermost arcana, what did he—what *could* he possibly know of the manners and customs of people whom till lately he had despised? Born and bred among them, he knew as little about them now

as if they were the aborigines of distant lands—say Fijian Islanders.

Reuben seemed to guess what was passing in his son's mind, for, with a sudden want of self-control, he cried, with a little return of the old freedom of speech and want of culture,

'Go at it—stick at nothing. Promise that I'll amend the Land Laws and extend household suffrage.'

'There is no occasion to be in a hurry,' said Godfrey, a little huskily. 'Would it do to have the people saying that this was a line assumed for the hustings which you objected to before?'

'I thought we'd decided on the Liberal policy, and that anything would go down with them,' answered Reuben. 'Let off plenty of fireworks. It'll do them good.'

'Hereditary instincts,' thought his son, balancing the pen, and thinking how to answer, 'have a trick of reasserting themselves when one thinks they have been stifled.—What I mean is,' he said, speaking slowly and trying to explain to his father, 'that a man

should get into the House of Commons simply on his own merits. His opinions and his ways of dealing with certain questions should have been formed beforehand, or they are apt to be useless.'

Reuben stared.

'I'm told that the Liberals as a rule are longest in office of the two, and money is no object with me. I made money for you and you look down on it. Now, look you here, I am ready to expend £5,000 in hard cash on the expenses of this election, and to make promises which'll cost me twice as much, when I've set my mind on a thing.'

'But it is equally certain that you must not lay yourself open to proceedings by the expenditure of that money,' thought Godfrey.

He kept the thought to himself, just as he likewise kept to himself a growing desire to draw a sharp distinction between the programme of the Liberal party and the new-fangled, semi-continental political philosophy which he had heard constantly discussed among the class of people with whom he had associated

in London. The important social questions of the day weighed more deeply with him than ever, but he had never been accustomed to treat them as mere watchwords of political strife; they had ever been questions with him to be received with profound earnestness, and to be approached on the side of self-sacrifice, yet he was no longer sure that they necessitated the redistribution of wealth.

How should he so word the printed address, and afterwards suggest material for Reuben's speech, as to preserve the just mean?

To secure for those who cultivated land the due results of their industry, to make rentals more equal, and taxation fair were still highly-cherished projects of his. But he had become more careful lest he should paint abuses in an odious light. He had lived to feel that it was one thing to be a Radical orator rousing emotions and covetous desires which might lead to acts of lawlessness, and another to be a conscientious philanthropist endeavouring to undo the consequences of admitted wrongs. He disliked argumentative tactics which might be

unfair, and, though he rejoiced in the fact that his father was now doing all that he could to help the tenants on his estate, he thought it unfortunate that Reuben should have chosen this special time to remit twenty-five per cent. off the rents of the tenants.

As day after day passed on—and the days were but few which preceded the Torringmoor election—he winced at the discovery of more than one flaw in the armour of respect with which he tried to invest his father.

Reuben's audacity and singularity surprised and alarmed him. He was as a man smarting under the sense of being foiled in the one project of his life—that of having a stupendous fortune, and founding a family in the person of his son—and comparatively reckless as to what he did with his money. The residue would be left to Godfrey, whose indifference to the fact was more than ever vexatious.

Godfrey had another vexation just then, but, after all, it was the way of the world. When he had been in London, the salesmen had found out that they did not need his work.

Now, since it had become known who he was, letters followed him in abundance, and it soon appeared that he could have as much well-paid employment, artistic or literary, as he pleased. Meanwhile it still occasionally happened that his renewed intercourse with his father was like walking over dangerous places. He had to be very wary of his steps. And Reuben's way of looking at things was so puzzling to him that to help his father at all was much like attempting to clear a jungle to which it seemed in vain to apply the axe.

Godfrey was as little desirous as ever of inheriting enormous wealth which he feared might have been acquired by tyranny and injustice, and which he looked upon as a precipitate from the labour of the many.

And Reuben was still reticent as to the manner in which he had acquired money. Whether or not he regretted the passionate explanation of his early personal wrongs and the vehement denunciation of the elder Rashleighs could not be known. But he spoke with unusual tenderness of Vere, and seemed to have put away

from him his bitter cravings after vengeance. In fact, the eight years had done much to transform the man. Though Godfrey was sometimes bewildered with a sense of shame when he saw Reuben for the first time cracking jokes with the mothers of dirty children, —stroking the hair of the little ones with his own hands, which had somehow become in the course of years well-formed and white—and though he objected to so many burgesses being asked to dine, it was impossible to speak judicially to his father on the subject.

Anything seemed to him better than that the old feeling of estrangement should crop up between them.

'Sellwood has made his book, and he will win,' said some of the Torringmoor people. 'He'll never open his lips when once he's in the House, but that speech of his was not a bad one.'

Reuben was fond of quoting the saying, 'The French cooks would be the best in the world, if they had got any butcher's meat.' And with the assistance of Godfrey, whom he

called his French cook, he had managed to put together a good deal of knowledge which was actually to the point.

The cheers and counter-cheers, the varied sounds which were expressive of animation or interest furnished the *vis* which was needed for the man's oratorical powers, who, if he had been reticent before, was rather proud than shy.

The cheers were to him as the breath of his nostrils, and in the excitement of the moment Reuben let out the fact that he had been a Torringmoor boy, setting out from his native town at the age of ten to earn a sparse livelihood. The imprudence of the admission did not occur to him till afterwards, when he was comforted by recollecting that the Torringmoor parish registers might be searched in vain for the name of an infant baptised by the cognomen which he had adopted. But, after the statement of this fact, Reuben's speech was a success. His anecdotes, his illustrations—homely though they might be—and his invective—a weapon with which he knew how to deal—touched in every case a

responsive chord. Not a word of his fell flat, and, if his rhetoric was a little too vivacious, it was admitted even by his opponents that he had at least fire and vigour; while the cultivated speech of his more powerful antagonist, given in a more or less melancholy manner, bore about as much resemblance to the speech of the other candidate, as pale moonlight might bear to midday heat.

Vere's words, 'You will have no cause to be ashamed of him. You can't tell how he has improved,' occurred to Godfrey's memory, as he took his father's arm, and walked back with him to encounter the little ovation which greeted them in the town.

'*You* did a lot for me, but Shakespeare did the most,' said Reuben, not a little pleased with himself, and quite forgetful that he had neglected to keep to the line of partial neutrality dictated to him by the younger man.

Godfrey's lofty scrupulosity would probably never have carried his father through the election, but now he began to think that, in spite of the appearance of the younger and more

sprightly Liberal, Reuben might win the seat from the Conservative, who considered himself to be a fixture.

'You were always fond of Shakespeare,' he said, encouragingly; 'you used to spend hours reading him. Why, one ought, after a time, to give out light almost in the dark, when one has been steeped in such an atmosphere.'

CHAPTER IV.

MEANWHILE Vere's growing anxiety respecting her cousin, and her perplexity and alarm at not being able to control the turn which matters were taking, prevented her from hearing much about the doings at Torringmoor. Knowing and bitterly regretting as she did that her judgments, her opinions, and tastes on many subjects seemed to the younger girl to be a little severe, she was the less inclined to exert authority over her.

'Do you understand,' one of the old ladies in the neighbourhood had said to her, half angrily, when she met her, 'that you ought absolutely to forbid that child going about by herself? If there is no one to control her, you should have left her at school.'

'She returned before my uncle's death.'

'The fact is, you two girls should not reside by yourselves.'

'I feel quite old enough for anything,' answered Vere, with her accustomed smile. 'We have our very old housekeeper, besides.'

'Past her work, as you know—it is *you,* to all intents and purposes, who are the housekeeper. And what with the dairy, and some farming—Excuse me, my dear, you bury yourself too much—you do not know what is going on outside your own place.'

'Henriette always walks with the maid—one of the maids—I have always managed it since I heard the place was so full. Would you have her cling to me like a shadow?'

'Humph!' said the old lady, with a grunt of disapproval, 'she might as well walk with her puppy-dog.'

She was apparently in the right, and Vere in the wrong. But unless the latter could have summoned one of her distant female relatives—who were all of them already distracted with curiosity, and to whom she must have confided

her own impecunious state, and the fact that she and her cousin owed much to Reuben Sellwood—there was really nothing to be done.

'It is a good thing,' she thought, 'that I have no brother to inherit a title coupled with starvation. With *our* lives the shame, as my poor uncle felt it to be, will end.'

She remembered that it had been Sir Ralph's dying wish that she and his little 'Dot' should continue to live in the old place as before, and that the gossip should be hushed up as Reuben's unexpected generosity had suggested. It was natural that the neighbours should be a good deal exercised on the subject, but there was something in Vere's manner which kept them from openly questioning her on her affairs.

'Could I turn a bright-eyed gazelle into a quiet, domestic pussy-cat? Could I force a girl to study when study is hateful to her? One wouldn't place roast beef before a toothless infant,' thought Vere, a little out of patience at the interference.

It was a worry to her to be forced to admit

that, though she had made up her mind to be a sort of protector to the girl, and was ten years her senior, she had not yet succeeded in being able to understand her.

There were possible depths in her young cousin's character which seemed at first sight to be incongruous with her wilfulness and frivolity. Unreserved and eager for sympathy, troubled by the mysterious unknown and the grey dulness of her present life, Henriette—when she first returned to England—had shed tears for imaginary woes for which perhaps a mother might have petted her and pitied her. But Vere, who, in spite of the secret troubles of her own life, had taken up her own work again with increased activity—and who was ready to attribute this so-called 'hysteria' to the boarding-school education, which had been unfortunate in its results—had shrugged her shoulders a little, and deplored the affectation. Latterly—perhaps too late—she had taken herself to task for a mistake, and had attempted to re-establish confidence between herself and the easily complaining creature, whose frail

organisation possibly accounted for her discontent. Vere fancied that she could read the poor little heart like an open book, and was only likely to err now in the opposite respect, that of crediting an excitable school-girl with undue feeling.

This afternoon she had returned from visiting a few of the cottagers, having vainly attempted to remonstrate with some of the men who were hanging idly about their doors, neglecting their work, with the stereotyped excuse, that it was ''lection-time.' It was a beautiful April day, and as she passed through the village she could not help admiring the fields studded with buttercups, the daisies with hearts of gold, and the fruit-trees in their spring toilettes, whose serious and practical dress would so quickly succeed their wedding garments.

It was not strange that Godfrey should be standing in their garden in talk with Henriette. It was at an interval when he might easily escape, and Vere had almost expected to see him. In a place like the old park, which seemed to

have fallen asleep, with nobody coming and nobody going, his visits were cheering. And the park was beginning to look beautiful in its spring attire, while she had a full recollection of Godfrey's artistic enthusiasm—a recollection so strong that she seemed again to hear the ripple of the waters, and the swaying and sighing of the branches of the fir-trees as the wind tossed them about one gusty day, years ago, in the wilderness. But something in Godfrey's attitude was strange, though she told herself that she had expected *that* as well. Not quite so soon, perhaps, for she had her old liking and admiration for the man, and though she accused herself of having treated him badly; she did not like to think he was 'light of love.' He was bending over Henriette, apparently giving her some flower, or—could it be?—a letter. And it seemed as if their hands lingered together. *He*, at least, to Vere's fancy, looked as if he still felt the touch of the cool, smooth brown fingers. So it had come—sooner than Vere expected—and she at least had the courage which had ever stood her in good stead even

when her physical strength began to sink to its lowest.

'The earth is waking from its wintry sleep, but all things are dead asleep that cared for *me*. God give me strength to care for *them*,' she said to herself, as she dragged her limbs on mechanically, conscious of nothing just then but the necessity for preserving her presence of mind.

Godfrey had never seen her look so majestic. The old black cashmere dress which she was wearing fell round her like the folds of drapery on a statue. A hot colour burnt on her cheeks, whilst the transparent shadow of a black bonnet which she was wearing, with lace strings contrasting with the fairness of her hair, showed off to advantage the skin which had once been so delicate, and which, in spite of its sunburn, was still fair.

'She has not altered nearly so much as I thought at first, and what matters if she *had* altered, if she is—as I now feel sure—still as noble in character?' he was thinking as she advanced, and, in a voice which was again a

trifle abrupt from the effort which she put on herself, asked,

'Shall I go away?' And then, with a laugh which seemed to him a little ill-timed, 'Oh, I thought perhaps that less publicity was desired.'

'We were talking about what everyone talks about—my father's affairs. The worst of a man placing himself in this position is that people rake up everything they can against him,' Godfrey answered, hoping to put her at her ease, and wondering that she should again have assumed the reserve and timidity of her country ways; for he was sure that this abruptness was veiled embarrassment, the more so when, turning to Henriette, she asked,

'Have you changed your shoes? The grass is damp to-day.'

'Oh, it is so like her to be always fidgeting about my health. You have no idea what an old nurse she has grown in her care of me,' laughed the girl, with colour which came to her own cheek in a rosy wave.

'Our neighbours say that I do not take enough care of you.'

'Our neighbours—I don't think any of them are worth knowing—present company always excepted,' answered Henriette, with another uneasy laugh, and then, with a shrug, concluding her speech. 'How dull it is! And yet she has managed to live here all these years. What shall I do when this election is over?' She nodded to Godfrey, and bounded across the lawn to please her cousin by changing the thin shoes, which were certainly wet.

Vere was following, but Godfrey placed himself before her.

'No,' he said, pleadingly, 'you must not pass me. The strange way in which you have evaded being with me alone——'

'I have evaded—nothing—I am not—aware of it. And just now I am really anxious about my cousin.'

There was a slight hesitation in her voice—so trifling that no one would have detected it who was not used to it.

'But—your refusal to listen to me.'

'Have I refused to listen to anything?—is it about the election? I—really forget.'

And she looked at him with a tranquillity so admirably acted that he was stopped in his speech.

'You are still very proud,' he said, speaking as if to himself. 'Why should you not be? You have ancestors dating from——'

She winced as if a stone had been thrown at her. It was the first sign of excited feeling she had shown.

'Oh, leave alone my ancestors! What good have they ever done me? It was not of my dead ancestors I was speaking, but of real flesh and blood. Dot has always been delicate, and I cannot get her to take care. Any illness, any grief, however slight—I mean a real grief—might kill that child.'

He bowed a little bewildered, and she hastened into the house, leaning her head for one moment against the mantelpiece in her own little sanctum. The marble against which she leant her forehead seemed burning, and she could not see as plainly as usual. It seemed useless to try to do her best, for she no longer held the clue which might help her to disen-

tangle the maze. Her own case was clear enough. Women, God help them, go on loving men long after men have nothing to offer them in place of the old flame but its ashes. She believed that Godfrey might still offer *that* to her, but it would be to his interest that she should elude his offer. There was intellectual sympathy between them—in some matters—but she had wearied of controversy, and did not care for party politics any more than for controversial debates about religion.

But intellect, as she knew, was worth nothing compared with the simple attractions of the heart.

'Does he imagine,' she thought to herself, 'that the blood which flows in my veins is cold, and that I have no longing for passionate love? I have always behaved in such a way that he *must* think so. And would *I* care, if I were a man, to fall back upon a *reasonable* life with a woman who was merely dry and clever?'

Her pitiless good sense seemed to make her understand that she was not nearly so well suited to be the companion of a man so near

her own age, as Henriette in her young freshness. But here was the dilemma. Vere was ready enough to suffer to promote the happiness of those whom she loved—ready enough to let Henriette be the joyous butterfly and she the labouring bee. It would have been comparatively easy for her to hide her own trouble, to let no one guess that she was suffering.

There would even have been a sort of pleasure arising out of the pain. Vere would have been as enduring as any fakir in India, assisting at her own tortures when a woman of another nature might have inflicted them on a rival. But what if there was nothing good to arise out of the martyrdom? It would not be possible to put any pressure on a man in the supposed interests of her cousin, nor could she deceive herself into thinking that Godfrey had listened with any show of interest to her account of the alarms—which might be, after all, ungrounded—which she was continually experiencing about her cousin's health.

She watched Henriette with increasing anxiety, but determined, with her usual good

judgment to let matters take their course. These were not long in reaching a climax, for on the following morning, as she was seated at her bureau, which was covered with small bills, Henriette—whose craving for sympathy could no longer be controlled—glided into the room, and threw herself listlessly on the couch.

Never had the contrast between the two girls been more marked than when the elder one, turning from her papers, took her seat by the younger one's side, and, looking her steadily in the face, said,

'If you have anything to tell me, I am ready to hear it,' and was completely taken by surprise.

'Have you ever been in love?' whispered Henriette, more than ever like the 'Dot' whose childish absurdities had remained unchidden, as she buried her little dark head in the pillow of the sofa.

The elder flushed violently, the bright colour flooding her face and neck. But dissimulation was so impossible to her that she made no reply.

'And your love remains still?'

'That depends on what you mean. Love does not die—it changes sometimes.'

'And if it changed?'

'I should submit myself to the will of God, and do my duty.'

'With life of one uniform grey tint, like a Quaker bonnet. *I* could not bear that long and live.'

'It is astonishing how easy one finds it to live.'

'No, no,' said Henriette, fairly breaking down, 'it would not be easy—I could not live on all those years.'

'My poor child,' said Vere, pityingly, 'that is only nonsense, though it will do for love-songs. What would become of the world, do you think, if that were the whole of life? There is plenty to do—work enough for women as well as for men on this earth, so full of interest and beauty. I mean what I say,' she continued, playing with the girl's hair; 'there's much to satisfy in life beside the eternal theme so continually harped upon by boys and girls—

it palls in time, and grows a little nauseous. Every novel is full of it, every song; and when you get to my age, it grows namby-pamby, to say the least of it. Why, the little sun goes down, but leaves plenty of brightness and light in life—in nine times out of ten the sun was but a farthing rushlight after all.'

She spoke lightly, as if in fun, but Henriette looked at her reproachfully.

'And you—engaged yourself—to speak like this?'

'Who said I was engaged? I have plenty to do, if that is what you mean. And even if I were, why, dear, people would be cowards if they could not bear to be sundered because they loved. Loved—*loved*, do you call it? To go about in a whining way, making the lives of other people wretched! Give it some lesser name.' 'A childish selfishness, weak, if not contemptible,' she would have added, but was afraid of being bitter.

By this time she had her arm round her cousin's neck.

'If life is to be desolate,' she said, cheerfully,

'it will be because we *make* it so. You and I for the present must be all-in-all to each other. For instance, we may try to have larger aims. Limbs grow numb for want of exercise.'

She did not know if she had succeeded in comforting Henriette. Probably that young lady had only intentionally extracted a secret from her. But she *did* know that her own great love, which was not limited in kind, had succeeded in conquering a storm which had agitated her; and that—in her readiness to try temporary remedies and palliatives for her cousin's sake—she was pleased to accept thankfully an invitation for Henriette to spend a few weeks with Mrs. Austin, which arrived that same evening.

At Mrs. Austin's house her cousin would hear more of the election, and would probably see more of the Sellwoods. Both reasons were conclusive, especially as the girl herself seemed to weary for change.

CHAPTER V.

As Reuben parted company with his son at the gate of Broadmeads Park—he himself having proposed that Godfrey should go at once to tell the Miss Rashleighs the events of the day—a man, whom he recognised as a member of the Torringmoor Town-Council, and who had been walking fast to overtake him, came smilingly up to him, and, while he congratulated him on the day's success, warned him that his future prospects might be injured, as some abominable anonymous letters were being circulated at his expense.

'I thought it better to let you know. The writer should be discovered at once and prosecuted; though of course no one cares for such

cowardly hitting in the dark, yet at a time like this——' continued his informant, a little embarrassed as he noticed that Reuben became strangely white, and that the veins on his forehead were starting into unusual prominence.

He broke off, confused, in his glib speech, as Reuben answered, in a rasping voice,

'If you want to know *my* opinion of anonymous letters, I look upon them as despicable insults, for the purpose of conveying cowardly and infamous calumny. Such mean attempts to bespatter the successful or the rich should be treated with indifference and contempt.'

'Oh, very well,' said the disconcerted informer, feeling as if he were falling he did not know where, and was half annihilated by this strange man's newly-found powers of speech.

'I should also like to say,' continued Reuben, in words which, in their good English, could have been used by Godfrey, though the latter would have shrunk from their tone of immoderate pride, 'that, since I have not thought fit to tell the story of my life, all reports circulated about me must be lying inventions.'

'There is something ridiculous in his assumption, as if he were so certain of being the right man to fit the right place—he, the poor boy who, by his own admission, worked hard for his bread in our caste-beridden town of Torringmoor,' thought the offended town-councillor, in derision.

Reuben had been wanting in his accustomed tact. He had not only bared one of his most important secrets to the gaping curiosity of people who had their prejudices of rank and station, but he had now made an enemy of a would-be friend.

He was conscious of his two-fold error as he retired into his study. Not only should he have done his utmost to propitiate the conservative respectabilities of this old-fashioned place, but he should not have defied the consequences of snubbing a Radical, and one who had been ready to help him. His self-justification was that he had been taken by surprise, and that the prudent steering between extremes which Godfrey had recommended as likely to lead to popularity, had ever been

hateful to him. He had been a hard-working and persevering man, with triumphs honestly won; a man, hitherto, of few words, and longing for the time when this 'palavering' would be over. But he was a man also of strong, instinctive good sense, and he had paled under the information of these anonymous innuendoes, as he immediately coupled them with some annoying advertisements which had appeared for some time in one of the provincial papers, and of which he had determined to take no notice.

Now that he was alone, he locked the door of his study, and took out one of these newspapers, also secured under lock and key in a compartment of a handsome inlaid escritoire. He read it with a curl of scorn upon the mobile lips, which he had always been so careful to hide by the now whitening moustache. It ran,

'If the man known at San Francisco in the year 1849 by the nickname of Jem N——, and now calling himself R. S——, will communicate with the advertiser, he may avert a

terrible danger to which he is at present exposed.'

'Jem N——, Jem Nobody—Mr. Nobody, as they called me when I told them, boy-like, that I didn't know my right surname; and I saw no earthly reason why they should not. I had a knack, in those days, of making queer friends,' he said to himself, paling again, and devoutly wishing that the advertisement was at Jericho.

He had laughed-off the thing in his own mind, having determined to make a *tabula rasa* of his past life. There was nothing behind the scenes of which he considered he had to be ashamed, but his new association with Vere Rashleigh made him guess how refined gentlemen and gentlewomen would receive with horror some of the uncomfortable communications which his old chums might have to make.

'I believe they are all dead, but perhaps I had better write politely to this fellow,' he thought, struggling against the over-powering desire to get the lash on the shoulders of some ungrateful person or other.

He sat down, and wrote to one of the officials of the paper.

'If the man who calls himself "D. B.," but of whom Mr. Sellwood has no knowledge, will call at Broadmeads to-morrow evening at seven o'clock, Mr. Sellwood will hear what he has to say.'

'No doubt the scoundrel who thinks he has some gossip against me is skulking about in the neighbourhood. I'll settle him to-morrow night —scare him with the awful lightnings of the law,' he thought, more satisfied with himself, as he enclosed the note in a second envelope, sealed it—but not with the newly-adopted Sellwood crest—and rang for his servant to give orders that another man should ride over to Torringmoor at once, and see that the letter was deposited in the hands of the editor of the paper.

'Tell him to go in plain clothes, and not to blab out where he comes from,' he said to the astute butler, whose experience of the conversational talent of his master would somewhat have startled the aristocrats who had seen fit of late

to patronise Reuben, and induce him to enter the presence of the goddess, styled 'Society.'

'We must not take up too high a tone,' Mrs. Austin had said. 'Riches are the "open sesame" to the highest sets in the country, so terribly are things changing of late.'

The next day was the one preceding that which had been arranged for the poll, and it was necessary that Reuben should again address a few words to his supporters amongst the working-men at the Guildhall. Godfrey had hoped for some further evidence of his father's expansion into more manly modes of thought, and wider fields of intellect. But he was disappointed.

From the first the meeting was more earnest than harmonious, and Reuben—who, surrounded by his friends, ascended the platform amid a waving of handkerchiefs, a holding up of hats, and all the signs of the enthusiasm of the previous day—found that he had to struggle through his sentences amidst the hisses, groans, and stampings of his auditors. Directly the unfortunate

candidate opened his mouth, he was interrupted by cries of derision such as 'Sailin' under false colours.' 'What's yer raal name, oud chap?' and then another voice, 'It's a curious sort o' name.' And there was a burst of laughter in answer to the interrupter, who stood close to the platform, and maintained his ground in spite of the counter-cries, 'Order, shame—turn him out,' with a quiet, half-amused twinkle in his eyes.

'Gi'e the gentleman a heerin'—it's a burnin' shame, when he's doin' his best to help us—that's right, lads,' as a number of gloveless, muscular hands were held up in Reuben's honour.

But what had become of Mr. Sellwood's oratory? That very morning he had refreshed his memory with the speech of Marc Antony that he might be prepared in his original way. But now he cudgelled his brains for a word which he wanted in vain.

A murmur rose through the room. There was a shuffling of feet instead of a waving of handkerchiefs. Thoughts and words rushed quickly

—pell-mell into the unhappy man's mind. But none of them seemed to suit him. He did not know how to begin. He remembered a certain sentence. It ought to have come in the middle of the harangue. But a lad near him, cried, 'Go it, old Californy—we're all a-awaiting for yer to begin,' and had his ears boxed by a policeman, which created some confusion, and was detrimental to thought.

'Europe has been bristling with arms. The soldiers are maintained at your expense. You are taxed for warfare abroad, and deprived of land at home when you ought to be labouring for the blessings of peace,' cried Reuben, with a hoarseness of voice and ungracefulness of manner which were new and alarming to his supporters.

That he, in his desperation, should sound in his turn the note of agrarian agitation, and talk of increasing the productiveness of the land—that provision should be made for peasant proprietors who had succeeded in all other countries but England—seemed like the quintessence of irony to those who knew

his history. A tittering could be heard in the room, and a few boys began to mew like cats.

'He took the land hisself,' shouted one of his opponents, in studiously offensive tones.

'His name's not in the parish register,' cried another.

Reuben wiped his forehead. His vision was becoming blurred. His tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. But he continued,

'Where is the England which ought to be the stronghold of the liberties of Europe?—her people have become weak and helpless, her nobles careful only for their own advancement.'

He stammered and stopped—unfortunately as if he were inviting the comments which his too responsive audience had already proved itself to be ready to give—but in reality to refresh his memory, portions of this address having been learnt by heart, after being composed in a style which had not been criticised by his son, and now appearing to be like parts of a child's puzzle, very difficult to fit together, and to

adjust to the notes with which Godfrey had provided him.

'If England is to be a stronghold,' remarked a quiet man, in a voice which was scarcely audible, except to the quickened acuteness of Reuben Sellwood's outraged sense of hearing, 'we want people who will build up. There are lots ready to pull down.'

A hubbub of interruption ensued. In vain the chairman rapped violently on the table. All his efforts to enforce order were useless. He could with difficulty make his voice heard.

'Wish he'd teach us 'bout *his own* gettin' on in the world. I'm not the man to stay away when there's a hint of *that* sort to be got,' cried another stentorian voice.

The speaker was one of the working-men who had been invited among the rest to come forward, ask questions, or say what he knew on the subjects discussed.

'Keep to the point,' said the chairman, while Reuben tried to encounter the somewhat impudent, but straight and fearless glance of the

man, in which there was not the slightest sign of embarrassment.

'Californy! Californy! Go it, old gentleman. We'd like to immigrate—the lot o' us—if we was sure of gettin' the same chances as you.'

'Don't you think it 'ud be a jolly good plan for all the swells to immigrate, and leave room in the old country?' asked another voice, which was greeted with shouts of laughter.

'Damn it all!' cried Reuben, losing his patience, and stamping on the paper which his son had given him, and with which he had meant to help himself in answering the speakers. He was in a rage with Godfrey at this moment for not drawing it out more effectively, and meant to tell him he had ruined his prospects because the handwriting was detestable.

'Don't swear—it's weak and stupid; it's doing the devil's work, as old Bunyan said, without his wages,' observed the same quiet man who had spoken before.

'Methody!' said another, increasing the mirth.

'Ranter, perhaps,' retorted a second.

'Raight—he be raight, ranter or not,' commented a third. 'John Davis knows what he's about—let Davis have his say.'

Davis had by this time glided quietly forward, and in a clear, penetrating voice, was addressing the chairman.

'I make bold to come forward, sir, and just say as I've come from the dyin' bed of a mate—as good and honest a man as ever I met since I came to these parts. That man, sir, lived all his days on nine shillings a week and a bit o' a cottage, and had a missus and three children to keep. And, as he lay a-dyin', he thought how he couldn't die comfortable without makin' a will-like. So he says to the missus, "Get down that 'ere jacket there." So the missus gave him down his workin'-jacket, and with his poor, weak hands he pulled out two old knives—one as he had when a boy, when he worked for Farmer Jones that had the farm up in the valley, and died three years agone. "Give that to Jim," ses he (that war his younger lad), "and t'other one"—what he'd use

hisself till the day he took to his bed—"to Jack" (that were his elder boy). "Tell 'em that's all I got to leave 'em," ses he. Well, sir, I'd just like for the candidate that's called "Liberal" to tell us what's a poor man to do when one as has worked all his days and been a God-fearin' man has naught to leave the wife and childer but two ole knives.'

Reuben stood meditating his answer, and wishing he had given more attention to Godfrey when the latter had been apt to bother him over-much about the difficult question of what the people were to do when the wages were so unaccountably low, and the folks themselves so terribly poor. He was ready to make any amount of promises *now*, but the words somehow stuck in his throat.

Meanwhile, the last speaker had glided away amongst the crowd. Not so the determined hinderers of the peace.

'Go it, old Dives—tell the Lazaruses what to do,' shouted one in his loudest voice, for the amusement of his mates. 'We axed yer a plain question—giv' us a plain answer. We

wants to know where we chaps is to go to git our bags o' goold.'

'Git along, you chattering magpie—here's the p'lice,' cried another, while the orator found himself pulled down by the legs from the bench which he had tried to mount as rostrum.

'Hooray!' cheered the crowd, whilst a wild shriek rang out from one of the women who had been having too much drink, and determined to make the most of the incident.

The workman, who was a heavy, grizzled, bull-headed man, struck out fiercely, with muscular arms, and for a moment there was imminent risk of some of the weaker people near him being trampled upon and rendered insensible, with half their ribs broken.

Then Reuben was himself again. He seemed to be suddenly galvanised into life. His earlier instincts asserted themselves once more, and with them his vernacular and his courage.

'Tek care of the women,' he cried, in a voice which ensured obedience. 'Most o' you men

ha' got heads on your shoulders, and brains in your heads. Don't fight like fools, but go home to your wives and childer. Well—I'll go too—and if—if—you've any respeck for me——'

Something whizzed past his ear, and at the same time one of the lights was extinguished. The chairman, who knew that an excited English mob could be brutal enough—before manly feeling and a sense of shame could resume their ordinary sway—rose to adjourn the meeting. But he could not make his voice heard. A policeman was already brandishing his staff, and Godfrey—sick with fear for the results—was proud of his father, as Reuben stood, with his big shoulders heaving and his voice commanding attention, careless of personal danger.

'Be steady, my lads, be steady—be keerful o' the women. I say nothing 'bout violence offered to *me*. But, if there's violence to the weaker sort, the law shall assert itself. It's a burning shame to cause danger for innocent folk.'

'Pray come along,' whispered one of his committee.

'Tak' care o' yerself,' retorted Reuben, proudly. 'I'll not go till the hall is cleared.'

'I'll stop and help you,' said another.

'No need for it,' answered Reuben, as—no one knew exactly how—the crowd went out peaceably, and what had seemed a few moments before to be a horrible situation, turned out to be nothing at all.

With the exception of the fact that as Reuben, a few minutes afterwards, descended the stairs in company with his son, he evaded a heavy blow on his back—stooping down, and picking the missile up. It was a large stone. Godfrey rushed after the assailant, who concealed himself in one of the darker passages, and, by turning and winding, managed to elude pursuit.

He rejoined his father, who was smiling.

'It will do for a relic,' remarked Reuben, quietly, as he put the stone into his pocket, and passed through the remaining stragglers and the few policemen, who were never informed of

what had happened, on his way to his carriage.

'Dismiss the coachman—or get in yourself. I prefer to walk,' he said, shortly, to his son.

'Take care of yourself—there is danger—there is indeed,' said Godfrey, wistfully.

Neither did *he* use the carriage, but, feeling it unwise to argue with Reuben in his present mood, made a *detour*, to see what it was possible for him to effect in the town. He must see the committee, to whom he knew that his father had shown scant courtesy and unconventional disrespect. It would be necessary for Godfrey to apologise, and to fix an interview. As he passed on to the committee-room, an acquaintance came up to him, and gave an account of the younger Radical candidate's special oratory that day.

Mindful of his failure on the preceding occasion, Mr. Edgar Dorst had dressed himself with minute care, and had been very sedulous in manipulating certain written notes. Once launched on the stream of florid oratory, there had been no limits to the inducements held forth to the credulous people who

had been fooled by his fervid imagination.

'There is a turn in the tide, I fear; it is *he* now who has got the ear of the people.'

Godfrey felt something rise in his throat, making him, as he said afterwards, like a big girl. He could scarcely tell why, but he somehow felt proud of his father, and more convinced than he had ever been before of the good impulses which were lurking in Reuben's nature, as he answered, impetuously,

'I hate these sort of political rope-dancers, giving promises where they have no right to give them—more daring than the renowned athlete who, instead of cooking omelettes on dangerous heights, developed the brilliant idea of driving young girls over on wheelbarrows. I had rather *not* see young fellows perform antics on the tight-rope of politics with their heads in sacks, risking falls which are likely to harm others as well as themselves.'

'You are a young man yourself,' laughed his friend.

'I don't feel like one,' he answered, with a huskier laugh. 'When I was young, I was for

settling every question in Heaven and earth; now I have learnt how the "mills of God grind slowly but surely." I can keep my mind more in the attitude of suspense. You see I am patriarchal.'

'And a sort of political agnostic, or at best a wretched Whig. The Whigs did great things in the past, but now that cautious picking of their footsteps is fatal.'

'Call me what you like,' he said, a little wearily, 'I confess that I have ceased to have dreams of political milleniums, and have little sympathy with the petulant cries or the coarse outbursts of some politicians. No doubt we are groping from old order to new, and in the twilight of a transitional period like this, one does not always see one's own form plainly. I used not to be afraid of the crude and novel, neither do I distrust the future now. But the older I grow the more I learn that sweeping reforms of all sorts—too violently carried out—may only put the clock back, tending to reaction and to tyranny.'

'And the working man?'

'My father was a working man. I am one

myself. But I will confess to you that I am much disabused about many of the brilliant schemes which used to be my programme for the working man. I have lived among them and have been haunted by the problem of how to help them for the best, and there have been times when I have almost doubted the feasibility of enlightening the lower stratum of all. I was out of heart *then*. Educate them by all means, and try to help them, but remember that there is a dangerous time in store for them.'

'How?' laughed his companion.

Godfrey pondered.

'It will not affect the thing one way or the other if I tell you what I think. But there is a crisis in the life of nearly every man when he wakes to the sickening consciousness of how little prospect of perfect happiness there is for him on this side of the grave; when he is apt to break with past traditions, striking out blindly like a drowning wretch in his struggle to reach his unknown God; and when there are plenty of busy folks too ready to deprive him of the comfort of

looking on to a future life. Many of our destitute and over-worked operatives are passing through such a crisis, and will pass through it. The miseries of modern life are the result of causes which lie too deep for us to set them right at once. But when men most need help it is when they are lifting their heads from the dense darkness of utter ignorance to the fog in which they are beginning to see.'

'Help—how?'

'Don't let them strike their heads and go down to the depths.'

'Against what?'

'Well, there are two especial rocks on which men split—it is not I who said it first—God and women.'

'Other rocks besides?' asked his companion, lightly.

Godfrey looked grave, for a drunken wretch at that moment staggered past them on the pavement. He had yellow ribbons on, and a yellow placard in his battered hand.

'I'm a martyr,' he grinned, 'to the o'ly cause o' freedom.'

Young Sellwood sighed as he turned away disgusted. The disgust increased as he passed a public-house in which there were maxims placarded about, 'The horny hand,'—'Labour is everything,' and others of the same kind.

'Come, come; there is no need for differences of opinion to lead to pugilism,' he said, good-naturedly, to a couple of young shopmen, who were standing together on the pavement, and who from hard words seemed to be likely to proceed to blows.

'I was trying to make him see that the English constitootion rests on its history and not on theories,' explained one of them, a little bombastically and sulkily.

'A constitution which is full of illogisims and contradictions, but which is still the best in the world,' said Godfrey, as he succeeded in separating the combatants.

Meanwhile Reuben had chosen a short-cut across the fields to Broadmeads. He unconsciously struck at the flowers with his stick, cutting off their heads. There were footsteps behind him and a shadow fell across him on to

the grass causing him to start and turn round irritably.

'I only wanted to warn yew,' said the man, who owned the shadow, 'ud go through fire and water to serve yew—but,' dropping his voice, 'there's enemies on yer track.'

'Look here—you want money, no doubt—but I've had enough for one day. I'm worn out and worried.'

'But I can give you information—don't yew want to be put on your guard?'

'Goodness knows! What is your information worth? Some mare's-nest or other.'

'It's more nor that.'

'You've got hold of some cock-and-bull piece of scandal,' said Reuben, angrily. 'My man—why do the lot of you hate me so? I'm sorry to say you are fighting against people who help you to get your bread.'

'I baint fighting against no one,' said the other, with a mocking laugh. 'In time you'll find as I was your friend.'

And the fellow cleared the stile with a bound and disappeared on the other side.

CHAPTER VI.

It was twilight when Reuben approached the walls of his estate at Broadmeads.

Dark as it was, he could discern white chalk pencilling in large letters near the gateway. He crept closer to the walls, fearing to be noticed, but taking a match-box from his pocket—which he generally carried for his cigars—he lit a wax match and held it to the chalk inscriptions.

The first was, 'Down with the impostor—Reuben Sellwood.' The next was facetious, 'No such person known here—name not in the parish register.' The third was, 'Liar!'

It was characteristic of Reuben that he had a secret pleasure in defying public comment, and

that his spirits rose as he began to think that he might make a clean breast of the whole thing in a letter to the morning paper, and that when he had told the story of his birth the tide of popular feeling would help to give him votes. The punishment for the time had been severe, but no doubt the triumph would be greater.

But, when he took up one of the Torringmoor papers for that evening, it was by no means reassuring. He dashed it down with an oath.

'Cowardly journalists! They worship the bugbear of humanity and yet are afraid of it. They are so-called strong minds, but they are in terror of the foolish spectre which Rousseau conjured up.' (He would have known nothing about Rousseau without Vere's reading.) 'They dream of a Paradise of equality, and yet, when some one actually born of the dregs of the population appeals to their theories—in real flesh and blood—they kick him and will have nothing of him—it's all pretence, this stuff about the entry of my birth—and they know it themselves; they hate the base-born.'

As he entered the house, he was told by the

quiet man-servant that a couple of gentlemen were waiting for him in his study.

'What sort of men?' he inquired of the butler, who did not immediately answer.

'Begging-letter humbugs, no doubt?—I have told you to deny me to these impostors.'

Something peculiar in the servant's eye made him feel uncomfortable. And then he remembered the appointment of that evening, which later and more vexatious circumstances had obliterated from his mind.

He awoke to the imminent danger of all the secrets of his past life being known by the people whom he employed.

One of the visitors rose slowly to meet him as he entered the study, inclining himself but slightly, the lower part of his face being partially hidden by the turned-up collar of his great-coat. The other remained concealed in the shadow of the curtains. In spite of the apparent modesty of the intruders, both faces were strangely familiar. The first man who had been pushed forward as if to bear the brunt of Reuben's anger was a square-built man, rather

highly-coloured and weather-beaten. He had long, red whiskers and restless eyes, seldom looking at anyone when he spoke. And, when he threw back his great-coat, he displayed a satin-scarf, fastened with a mock-diamond pin.

'Dick Baker—I didn't guess you were in the land of the living, so I didn't recognise your initials,' exclaimed Reuben, with a laugh, as he glanced across him to the other fellow, with the expression of one who felt himself to be fated to evil.

Both of the faces revealed potentialities of ferocity, but that of the taller and darker man was especially cruel. An acute physiognomist would have detected, in the handwriting on it, the triumphant perversity of a life which had submitted to no restraint, nor shrank from the lowest forms of corruption. The brows revealed intellect, and its fine sweep could not be entirely destroyed. But in the puffy cheeks, the Bardolphian nose, the eyes, half enclosed in folds of loose skin, and the lewd, smiling, self-contented mouth there was a sort of resem-

blance—of which this man, who called himself a gentleman, was proud—to the later portraits of Francis I.

A sneer sat on the mocking lips, and his laughter was bitter as he rejoined,

'And so you had killed me off, as well as poor Dick. You might be a little more grateful. You forget that this is a personal matter, and it was your own fault if you did not give it the immediate attention which for your own sake we desired.'

He had the style of a reasonably well-educated man, and his off-hand manner came natural, as if he had practised it from his boyhood.

Reuben's face was impassive, though his heart beat tumultuously.

'I fail to catch your meaning. I knew you both at San Francisco, was associated with you at the gold-diggings, was obliged to you for assistance. But I knew too much of you to desire your further acquaintance.'

'*That* was the reason you did not answer our advertisement?' And there was a flash as

if of steel from the small eyes half-enclosed in the baggy folds beneath them.

'Why should it mean *me*—that foolish advertisement in the paper? Loads of other people have the same initials.'

'If you knew all that *we* know, you would jump at the offer we have to make yer,' said the square-shouldered man, with the air of one who had laid a trap, and looked for another to be caught in it.

'*If I knew!*' repeated Reuben, in a mystified manner, but feeling as if something disgraceful could be the only way out of these sudden complications. 'Do you mean to say that you have acted the spy upon me all these years?'

'Ah! you hear un. He have waited till time should bleach him white—ha! ha!' laughed the red-headed scamp, nudging his more formidable companion, who stood behind him.

'I have not the faintest idea to what you allude,' answered Reuben, in his most telling English; 'but I know there were many queer passages in my life as there are in the lives of

most adventurers. And if you have trumped up something against me, and suppose you can excuse it to your consciences—your consciences which are so ragged and battered after the way in which you used to treat 'em that I wonder you can put 'em into working order at all—out with it at once—let us hear the worst o' it. But understand, once and for all, you'll not have a stiver out of me.'

The annoyance had become horrible. Reuben's cheeks were blanched. The perspiration stood in beads on his forehead. He seemed to anticipate something terrible, as he gazed, with haggard face and burning eyes, at the intruders.

He had seen enough of these men at the gold-diggings, and afterwards in the States, to make him aware that they knew of his being engaged in all sorts of large speculations, and of the prosperity which attended these speculations.

'They want to get money out o' me,' he said, between his teeth; 'but they have not the shadow of a claim to a farthing.'

The shorter man crept back, cowed by the rage in him, which already amounted to a passion of fury.

'Are you not a little *warm?*' asked the other, with a sarcastic smile. 'I envy you your life. After the large scale on which you have worked, it must be pleasant to kick up one's heels in this old Eden here. For my part, I can't put myself out to grass yet awhile—I'm too fond of excitement and travel, and if you listen to me, instead of being so peppery——'

'Listen to *what?*' asked Reuben, with the veins on his forehead again starting into prominence.

'I suppose you are aware that your name has been coupled with a disgraceful story, which has——'

Reuben waved his hand disdainfully. He prided himself on having nothing to do with those scavengers of society, the purveyors of tittle-tattle, and would have swept the place clean of such trash had he been able. He began,

'I am not answerable for all the gossip of this place.'

But the other burst into a laugh which jarred on him, and then, creeping up nearer to Reuben, whispered a name into his ear.

The effect of the name was magical.

'Poor lad!' the master of Broadmeads tried to articulate. But a tremor had seized his lips. 'It was a horrible story,' he added. 'We meant no harm; but we were all to blame. What more could we have done? The unhappy fellow couldn't swim.'

'Poor devil! he was not the first to get drowned in that fashion. But it was *you* who proposed it, and you who must pay the penalty; there's a tale of manslaughter against you—or murder—or what you choose to call it. We come to you as friends; the evidence is all in our hands. And, unless you pay us well, we mean to make it public.'

A fugitive colour appeared on Reuben's haggard cheeks. He coughed, and passed his hand between his collar and his neck, as if the former was too tight to allow him to breathe.

'Did they——?' His voice died off; he could not finish the sentence.

'Hush! speak low,' said the other, bending forward. 'Did they dig up the body, did you ask? It was *you* who suggested it should be buried close by in the sand. We dug it up long ago. Dick Baker knows where to find—'

'It's a diabolical accusation invented by the wickedest malice,' cried Reuben, leaping to his feet.

'Dunno,' said Baker, from a safe distance, with the table between himself and his exasperated listener; 'it do begin to look fishy. Some one says as how you had a grudge against the poor rascal, and he one of the weakly sort, and when we found the goold—you mind that day—we was a'most starving, the four of us, and you and Pierce took the lead? Well, we found the goold at last in a large queer sort of a hole, with a torrent o' water rushing down from the heights upon it, and you said as how the force o' the water for ages past was enough to cause the depth o' the 'ole.'

Pierce nodded his head.

'It was about thirty feet,' he interposed, 'with perpendicular rocks on either side, and

the water cold as ice; but the gold that glittered at the bottom! Enough to enrich the population of a city!' and he rubbed his hands at the recollection of it.

'Well, it was *your* proposal—to tie a cord round the wretch's body, and let him down to get at the gold, and, when we draw'd him hup, he was dead.'

'*Liar—cowardly liar!*' cried Reuben. 'You know well enough we proposed it between us; I was let down myself.'

'You—you can swim like a rat,' and Baker burst into a mocking laugh.

'If I could swim, my teeth chattered—my blood was frozen—and yet I did it.'

'It was easy to you—it was death to him,' said Pierce, with his tormenting eyes fixed on his victim.

'*I* protested against his going—but you jeered at him—and roused his pride—you insulted him; and he threw himself violently into the water,' answered Reuben, in desperation.

'Who is the witness of that? We are two against one.'

'And others in Californy,' added Baker. 'We has their signatures to show.'

For the first time in his life, Reuben flinched, as though he had been struck, and stared at his accusers, breathing hard. He hesitated a little before speaking, but when he spoke it was in a manner so decided that the first sensation of those who had plotted against him was that their project had miscarried.

Turning disdainfully from the fellow whom he called Dick Baker, he addressed himself to Pierce.

'It is disgraceful. You have crossed my path more than once before in my life, but you shall not cross it again. If I ever did what was bad, it was through your influence; and, if you think that you're to have the upper hand of me agen, you're mightily mistaken. I won't give way a bit. *Did you ever know me give way?*'

'You've been having a fine time of it,' said Pierce, with facetiousness. 'Now, if you'd listen to me, instead of being so impetuous——'

'I will not listen to you. Why, to listen to you is to mix myself up in all the vile schemes

of your plague-spotted life—crime piled upon crime, and the whole loathsome heap white-washed like a sepulchre.'

'You speak strongly,' answered his tormentor, with a laugh.

'Not too strongly for you.'

'Well, we will leave till you are in a sweeter temper—or make our story known to the municipal corporation, or the Torringmoor newspapers—while the trifle of a few thousands—which would never be missed by you——'

Reuben turned on him with an oath, which he was never likely to forget. The unutterable bitterness and disgust of life which he felt, after the overpowering events of the day, had rendered him indifferent to consequences. The whole thing was like a lurid nightmare, that, because in the madness of his ambition he had mixed himself up with politics, this fellow, with his trap so skilfully set to catch him, should bring upon him an accusation more terrible than death. He was sick at the thought of the gossip and the cruelty of the criticism which he saw to be hanging like an avalanche

over his head. And yet—since Vere's influence had been brought to bear upon him, since Godfrey had unconsciously accustomed him to think of nobler things—the alternative proposed, to buy these wretches off with money, was impossible.

'I suppose it will be rather a wrench to part with so large a sum, but it will be a greater wrench to be denounced to the world in general as——'

The shot struck hard, but it also sharpened Reuben's rage. If passionate hate could lead a man to commit a murderous assault, it is astonishing that Pierce was not felled to the ground at that moment. Accustomed as Reuben had been to crush opposition, and, from a long course of habit, dictatorial, if not violent, the last threat seemed to exasperate him beyond the bounds of endurance.

He leaped to his feet, and approached Pierce, who cowered into his corner as if he feared that the rich man whom he had come to intimidate would be likely to lay violent hands on his person. Dick Baker crouched down on

the opposite side of the table, with flagrant abandonment at even a pretence of the virtue of courage. Then Reuben as suddenly drew back, as if from a reptile. To come in contact with Pierce's person would have seemed to him as repulsive as to touch a loathsome toad. The face which had flushed, the eyes which had gleamed, and the hands which had trembled grew suddenly still.

'Leave my house,' he said, 'scoundrel! Oh, you need not be afraid. I have a long score of insults and cruelties to repay you, but this last insult of all is beneath my notice. Come, you have contrived it very cleverly—the devil himself couldn't have managed it better. I almost think the devil himself must have taken up his residence in your body. But dare to ask me for blood-money—for the innocent chap I loved—killed by a cruel accident, through the rage for gold *you* taught us—you, the so-called gentleman, but the greatest cad of all amongst us, hatching your serpent's brood of wickedness from the greed for money which possessed you. Not one farthing of mine shall you have, if you

begged on your knees for it. But to enter my house and dare to threaten me, as if you did not know that I would sooner a thousand times quit this miserable masquerade, and pitch the whole lot o' the money into the sea than tighten your diabolical toils around me—and—and——'

He shrank from speaking more plainly. The disgust with which the thing had inspired him was mastering him again. But, with a sort of gasp, he resumed his speech.

'Ask yourself if I will ever alter what I have said. Have you ever known me change my purpose, or abandon a determination? I was an uneducated lout when you met me at San Francisco, smarting from a sense of wrongs which gave you a sort of hold on me. But could you ever make me change my ground—could your inducements appeal to me, could—'

'You—you were very tenacious, certainly,' muttered the other man, who saw that he could expect no assistance from Baker, and who staggered back pale from fear. It was not the first time in his life that he had stood in dread of Reuben's muscular arm, and he knew that a

blow from such an assailant might injure his shattered frame.

'Then begone—both of you—or I will summon some of my men, and you shall be kicked down every stair of this house till you reach the door.'

'You are mad—for to-morrow morning all the town shall ring with this—we have already got the paragraph printed—we——'

'Oh, I care nothing for to-morrow morning—not a snap of the fingers for this election—or your contemptible threats either. But I have it from your own lips—you remember my tenacity of purpose—that Reuben Sellwood——'

'Jem Nobody,' interrupted Pierce, with a feeble attempt at a sardonic laugh.

'The name signifies little. If *you* were a gentleman—I rejoice that I was a working-man and a democrat. But I wish to remind you that the man who stands before you has passed through other struggles, and that when he was rough and beggarly in aspect—even then he was accustomed to command respect. How did he command it? By never going back from

his word, by never faltering in a purpose on which he had set his heart. You can practise on my reputation as much as you like—you have chosen your time well. But I have taken my resolution. I care nothing for entering Parliament, compared with my determination to see you stand in your rightful place—the dock. Now—begone.'

CHAPTER VII.

REUBEN had spoken truly. No audacity could rival his own. No effeminate indecision, no paralysis of will had ever made him swerve from the path he marked out for himself. It was, after all, a wonderful character—the passion and energy in it could scarcely rival its force.

Its very eccentricity was the outcome of the seeds sown in early youth. He saw this after the men had quitted him. The very foulness of their accusations had revealed to himself that atrophy of the moral senses which had allowed him to be maddened at this unfounded charge, whilst all the time—as God only knew—another murderous impulse had been at work in his heart.

'God help me—if there is a God,' he thought,

as he sat with his head buried in his hands. 'Who can say that I was not the indirect means of hastening old Sir George's death? I forgave the old man at last, but I would have given a deal—when it was too late—to know that no letter o' mine had reached him before his fall.'

Sir Ralph had assured him on his deathbed that he thought he had no cause to reproach himself for the accident, and it was astonishing how kindly disposed Reuben had felt since to the whole Rashleigh family.

He even wished that Sir Ralph was alive that he might go to him and pour out his woes. He knew so little of law himself that he could not anticipate his opponent's plan of arranging a campaign against him. He was only determined that this plot should be frustrated, and his determination of bringing one of the greatest rogues who had ever lived to justice gave him for the moment an actual feeling of excitement almost bordering on pleasure.

Yet, strong as his nervous system was, it had been so shaken that, as the retreating footsteps of the villains died away, he could almost

have been certain that the table on which he was leaning his arms was reeling, the floor giving way beneath him, and the walls advancing as if to crush him.

It was a relief when the gong sounded for dinner. Knowing how imprudent it would be to disturb his father when the latter had retired to his own apartment, Godfrey had not been near him yet. The house was large, and it was so difficult to know what was going on in one part of it while he himself was occupied in another, that he had contented himself with thinking,

'It is a harassing day—and my father may have important business of his own.'

But the family meal was somewhat more formal than usual, the gaiety flat and forced. And long afterwards Godfrey remembered how he had been struck by an unusual expression on his father's face—how the forehead seemed to have become narrower—the lips closed in a firm line which was apparent in spite of the partial covering of the beard, and how the high thin nostrils had sometimes quivered as if with

repressed emotion. Yet Reuben tried to joke in a tone of voice which was a little too highly pitched in its attempt at being bright, and which was quite out of keeping with his facial despondency. He drank deeply of champagne, and, if anything, seemed to be a trifle too jovial. Some of the members of his committee, who had been invited to dine with him, separated early, as each had work in preparation for the morrow. Godfrey went out with one of them, and Reuben strolled to the gate smoking a cigar.

When he was alone his look became serious, and after hesitating for a moment he also went outside the gates, and finding that the road was clear sauntered up to the wall, and striking a wax match examined it closely.

The chalk writing had been added to, and beneath an inscription in large letters, 'Sailing under false colours,' another and smaller one had been added. Perhaps no one but himself could have deciphered it—the hand-writing was so small, as if the coward who had written it had shivered at the recollection of possible consequences. But Reuben saw it clearly—it was

'Murderer.' An artist of somewhat unpractised talent had even depicted a miniature gallows, and on it was a figure on which again was inscribed 'Slaughterer.'

The unknown seas of feeling and rage which had been within him, rising in him, and threatening to overwhelm him, made his pulse beat again with unhealthy irregularity—his heart giving rapid beats, and then seeming as if it would stop.

'Am I mad?' he thought, as he passed his hand rapidly over his eyes, disdaining to rub away the atrocious lie which was recorded on his own walls in the rough chalk.

It had been easy to doubt as to the coherence of the 'mind-stuff' of such flabby personal existences as those which Dick Baker and Edgar Pierce had ruined by gambling and drink; easy enough for Reuben—had he not been a professed materialist—to picture to himself the possibility of such minds being 'obsessed' by evil denizens of the spiritual world. Such men were either mad or possessed by the devil, if there was a devil—an

alternative on which Reuben placed a mental reserve. But he who had been ever temperate till this night, and industrious according to his lights, why should *he* be doomed to undergo such tortures?

It was as if an abyss had opened before him and as if the kick which was suddenly to overturn all his bricks had been brought about by his own imprudence. Why had he ever attracted attention to himself by entering the political arena, for which, after all, he was not fitted? He had a keen sense of treachery to himself.

He did his best to restrain his ebullitions of temper. But when the man-servant at ten o'clock announced that Miss Rashleigh had come, accompanied by her old housekeeper, and had something important to tell him about the morrow, he turned on him a face so pale and agonised that the man asked, a little curiously,

'Are you ill, sir? I can make an excuse for the lady to come in the morning, if so be——'

'I'm not ill—any more than you are,' thun-

dered Reuben; 'it's no business o' yours,' thus making a fresh enemy for himself.

In another minute Vere was in the room. She visibly shrank from the meeting at so unaccustomed an hour, and lost her composure, as she exclaimed,

'Mr. Sellwood—you will think it odd. But they have been saying all sorts of cruel things about you in the town. And—I—I—it would be no business of mine—only you know how you offered me a home—and how I cannot say how much I thank you—*I* would trust you, if no one else in the world were to trust you, I know how good you can be—how you would not allow an affront to be put on my uncle—and—when somebody came to me late to-night—and said that an old woman who is dying has a story to tell—and can clear up the mystery of your birth—before—to-morrow—time is short,' she added, energetically, but rather confusedly, with tears standing in her eyes. 'I—I came to tell you—it is important that you should go to see this woman to-night.'

'Impossible,' he answered. He spoke slowly,

almost sternly. At that moment she seemed to him not as a pleader, but as an inquisitor, who had come with the curiosity of her sex to probe the wound from which he was already suffering.

'Why impossible?' The tears in her eyes were more impressive than her words, but her voice was trembling. 'The woman may die—every hour is of importance.'

Her weakness made him ashamed. He cared much for this girl, whose sympathy had raised him from previous despair. He still looked upon her as his future daughter—the wife destined for his son. By erasing himself, he hoped to make the marriage more feasible.

'I will tell you what I can tell no one else. You have a right to my explanation. If I seemed to speak abruptly—it is because I am going away very soon. It does not matter to me what people think about me—my birth or anything else. I am sick of craving for notoriety, for money, position, or anything else.'

'*Very soon?*' she asked, amazed. 'Isn't your decision a strange one?'

'It is the result of a day's reflection.'

'You do not mean——'

'I will tell you frankly. I have got into so queer a groove. I find so great a divergence between the lives of ordinary people and my own —I crave so for rest—for escape into a different air—that I have decided to leave this very night.'

'No, no!' cried Vere, in alarm. 'Oh! it is not possible—it would be too dreadful—they will put the very worst construction on your flight.'

He looked at her, and tried to smile. He did not consider himself a coward. Indeed, it was his intention to do his utmost to grapple with what seemed to be a pitiless, inexorable fate.

'I have ceased to care what people think.'

It made him more conscious of the jangled dissonance in his own life, when he thought of the sweet self-sacrifice and dutifulness of hers. He had not done this thing, but as he looked at her he became conscious of what it was to bear about a silent court of justice 'in himself,' to be arraigned as a prisoner at the bar, condemned in other things by the judge and jury of his own accusing conscience. He had deliberately planned the misery of this girl's

family, and now on his own path to prosperity was the drawn sword and gleaming robe of the avenger.

'Sometimes,' he said, speaking half to her and to himself, 'I have a feeling that it might have been better for me never to have been born.'

She came nearer to him and took his hand.

'Mr. Sellwood, for the love of God, don't talk like that! Go away—*for ever*, do you mean? You are desperate and full of morbid fancies. Shake them off—see this woman to-night—the cloud which hangs over you now will be cleared away.'

'No, I was wrong to come back to the old country—I was too rough for it. It would have been wiser to buy another spade and a rifle, and go back to some wilderness on the other side o' the Atlantic.'

She tried to answer him after his own fashion, but he could not tell her that there was likely to be a brand set on his name—a real dishonour which he could never recover—and that he had fancied once or twice, when he listened at the

back of the house, that he heard footsteps as of men approaching to arrest him. A sort of terror, which deprived him of his usual nerve and good sense, had taken possession of him.

Again the scene came before his eyes, which had always affected and haunted him, of a band of rough men, principally young, but of different nationalities—herded together for the discovery of gold in a strange land, some of them ill from the exhaustion of unusual exertions, and one—a delicate Italian boy, unused to the vicissitudes of climate, and but lately separated from his mother. Reuben had protected and helped the lad, but when Pierce, who was the leader of the party, had suggested that each should take it in turn to dive for the precious metal in an abyss of water which seemed to some of them like the gate of death, it had been easy to foresee danger for the boy, who could neither swim nor incur without foolhardiness the shock of the icy chill. Reuben had tried in vain to dissuade the lad, but when the poor fellow, goaded by taunts, had allowed himself to be lowered by cords into the stream, and was drawn up again

a corpse, he, as well as the others, had improvised a hasty grave, and agreed to say nothing about it. Such things were common enough at a time and in a place where Lynch-law was powerless to punish mistakes, and could only inflict vengeance for deliberate crime.

But that the pitiful story should crop up again, in a form which he in his wildest dreams could never have anticipated, and be used as means of extortion by men who would swear away their own souls—if false-swearing could bring them money—had nearly maddened him, and deprived him of his usual power of thought.

'Listen,' he said, 'Godfrey will be coming; it is too late for me to upset you by telling you anything else now; but, if I leave to-night, I should not like you to think badly of me. I will write.'

'I am not upset. Let your son go with you, it will be better to tell him all about it, and to take him to travel with you in the same train.'

She had risen to her feet as she said this, and stood before him erect yet pleading.

'You think I have taken leave of my senses—

that I want a keeper,' he said, with a shrug. 'I daresay others will think so too. They will shake their heads over me to-morrow, and suppose that I have gone for a spree on the Continent.'

'Take some one,' she repeated.

'Speak lower,' he said. 'We must not be heard. My own son thinks badly enough of me already. He is the last man in the world whom I wish to know about this. I must trust you not to tell him a word.'

She saw that there was nothing to be done but to humour him. But not the less, when she stood outside, did she rally herself by the force of her character. Her hands were painfully squeezing each other, but the forehead was no longer drawn into distressful puckers. She no longer felt as if she had lost herself, her better self, and as if all this was a dream, in which she was taking no active part. She had made up her mind what to do.

CHAPTER VIII.

Long after the household had retired to rest that night, Reuben opened the drawers in his study, and threw packets of letters into the fire. His dog, as if it suspected something terrible, was scratching at the door. He pushed it gently into the room, shut the door on it, then huddling his hat over his brows, and taking the precaution to put on an old great-coat, pulling the collar up to his ears, he crept out by the back passage, which had been specially planned by the architect of the house that the steward might have interviews with the poorer people.

'God help me, if there be a God,' he murmured again, as he crept into the outer air. The vague, unsatisfied craving after something

beyond and without him, the glimmer of instinct which made him sometimes feel after the world in which he had said he had no belief, was stronger than usual within him now. He looked up at the starlit sky and wondered with a groan how God could remember his soul amongst the seething multitude of worlds. The verse in the Psalms came back to his memory and he could not even hope to be hidden in the darkness. It was cowardly perhaps to fly, and more cowardly to groan 'too late,' but his eyes seemed to be opened to see the lost opportunities of a wasted life.

He had determined to change clothes with a working man to whom he had been kind, and who would not betray his secret.

Meanwhile Vere, who suspected some strange secret, and who had an earnest desire to sacrifice herself in any way to help him, had been also making her way through the slumberous moors on this starlight night. It had been only old Nancy's great fidelity which led her, as she thought, at the risk of her life, to follow her daring young mistress, as the latter plunged into

the night air, supposed by the old woman to be charged with malarious mists fatal to the young and the old. She had grumbled not a little when, after a long, whispered conversation with the village lad who had been engaged to act as guide to them in their journey, Vere had apparently dismissed him, though at the same time she took money from her pocket, and seemed to be paying him extravagantly.

There was a touch of stubborn desperation in the way in which her young lady said, in a voice calm and clear,

'This way, Nancy dear—he has told me where to go, through the wood and then over the stile above, right on amongst the heather to Bill Saxtens'—there is a poor old soul there who is dying; we must not wait till the morning, or she may be dead.'

'Dear heart alive,' protested Nancy, but just then a dark cloud passed over the face of the sky, and she shuddered, clinging closer to the soft hand which was caressing hers, as if to give her the power to go on when her poor old body was crushed and limp.

'Would you like it, Nancy dear, if *you* were lying dying and I refused to come?'

There was no answer to this appeal, and Vere continued,

'If you owed a person a great deal, would it not be a cold and cruel injustice to repay his generosity by deserting him just when the rest of the world were beginning to give him up?'

Meanwhile Vere was coaxing her companion on, showing her how to place her feet so as to avoid the difficult stones. But in spite of the strength of her will her heart sometimes misgave her, and it struck her with a sort of chill to think of the horrible mistake she might have made, and prejudiced Mr. Sellwood's interests instead of helping them, by obeying the mysterious summons which had been sent to her. Vere was not a woman to reject a man utterly on account of a criminal past, but for Godfrey's sake she shuddered. Was it wise to challenge an investigation of Reuben's past life from which he himself evidently shrank?

The chilly feeling was growing stronger every moment, and Vere's eyes were arrested the

moment she entered the cottage by the look of ghastly horror in the face of the aged figure which was lying on the bed. A figure which seemed to her at first to have little of the semblance of life. The wrinkled, white-lipped woman looked pale indeed, and the whiteness of the hair added to the singular effect.

It was only when she came nearer to her that Vere saw how the forehead was damp with cold perspiration, and how the claw-like hand was shaking more with strange excitement than with fear. The sick woman even made an effort as if to raise her head from the pillow, and seemed to feel for something with the other hand which she had concealed under her pillow.

'Yes, yes, Goody—it be right enough; yew shall give it to the leddy; she du hev troubled over it terrible,' said a woman who stood near her. 'She be ninety year old, o' more,' she whispered to Vere, 'an' sume o' us think as she be *that* queer in her head.'

It was evident enough, as these words were uttered, that the figure could *hear*. For the

eyes, which had glittered as the only sign of life, were distended again with the look of horror which had struck Vere when at first she had entered the room.

The few women who were gathered round the sick-bed, with the singular interest which the poor invariably take in death, retreated as if in fear, and Nancy clutched Vere's arm.

'There be times when I thinks as she be a witch. There she was a-mutterin' to herself afore ye came, as she heerd a voice, and knowed as ye was cumin',' said the woman who spoke before, apparently possessing more nerve than the others, and bending over the dying woman to shake up a pillow.

'In the dark ages the poor creature would have been burned,' thought Vere, as a tender feeling came into her face, and she set herself, with her usual firmness, to the difficult task.

'You have something to tell me?' she asked, bending over the unhappy creature, who was making futile efforts to speak.

The encouraging, yet grave smile with which Vere spoke seemed to abridge the struggle

somewhat. Yet it was some little while before the silence was broken.

'It is something on your conscience—you feel as if you cannot die without confessing it?' asked Vere, with a pathetic cadence in the true ring of her voice which seemed to stir some hidden feeling in the dying woman, though as yet there came no answer.

'Be it 'bout them babbies, Elspeth, as you were a-tellin' o' me? Now, didn't you dream it all, Goody?' asked the other woman, encouragingly. 'You said as how ye changed 'em, didn't ye?'

'Hold up your hand if you cannot answer,' said Vere, trying to help, as another effort was made for the failing breath, and a sort of wild vindictiveness came into the white face.

'Dhrame!' she said, in a harsh whisper. 'I tell ye it were no dhrame! I changed the blessed cratur, and left him for a beggar's brat —as wur my ain young leddy's. The curse o' God ha' blasted me iver since, and yet I did it for the raight.'

'Tell the leddy 'bout them names,' persevered

the other woman, while Vere listened with the sick feeling caused by a new sort of dread, and yet in ignorance as to whither these questions tended.

'My young leddy's—'twas the heir. I heerd 'em say—too late—as the title and all the property wur his. He wur Sir George's eldest son. His mother wur raightly wed; here be the weddin' lines.' And, with an effort of strength such as the dying sometimes make, she tried again to draw from beneath her pillow a leathern parcel which she had worn attached by a string to her neck.

Vere's mind had been instinctively casting out feelers, as if for escape from a new perplexity, during this conversation. So that at times she scarcely heard the questions which were asked by Bill Saxtens' wife, and her thoughts were unconsciously veering to the other question of whether the sharp lad whom she had set to watch Reuben's movements would be able to telegraph to her with the assistance of the clerk at the office. But at the sound of Sir George's name she began to give

her attention. Then this baby, whoever he was, must have been a relation of hers. Ah! that was it. Her uncle, her father's elder brother by another marriage, said to have died when his mother died—and—— Her mind could not follow. For a minute she was in a state of expectant suspense, staring at Mrs. Saxtens with a look of horrified inquiry.

The whole story, which began to dawn upon her, seemed at first to be so ridiculously impossible—so absurdly like that of the 'Claimant' of newspaper renown, or of heroes of penny dreadfuls—believed, by the people who read such sensational romances, to have been 'kep' out o' their own' by some wicked scheming of usurping relations—that she had much difficulty in believing it. Old-world and childish myths of Perseus in his box on the waters; Romulus and Remus abandoned to the tender mercies of a wolf, or of the she-bear which was said to have looked after Paris, floated before her memory. She remembered that all the boys so got rid of turned out to be rightful heirs when their presence was least ex-

pected, and that the lesson—inculcated thousands of years before—was that Fate was not to be eluded nor prophecy unfulfilled.

To connect the matter-of-fact and nineteenth-century Reuben with such a romance was somehow so incongruous that, had it not been for the solemn circumstances, she felt as if she must have burst into hysterical laughter.

'Poor young lady—it is too much for her,' said Mrs. Saxtens, pityingly. 'It do hurt her to hear o' this, and such a time o' neet!'

'The question is not whether it hurts me, but whether it is true or not,' answered Vere, her voice calm and clear as usual. 'I see that this bag contains a copy of the marriage certificate of my uncle's first wife, and the birth certificate of their child. The child was supposed to have died—it was buried in due form.'

'But the old 'oman changed the children herself—she hev signed the writing afore you came,' answered Saxtens, who seemed to be more reasonable than the rest of the listeners, handing a piece of paper, in which he himself had taken down the confession, and to which the sick woman had added her rough signature.

'That 'eer parcel fell off the blessed child when she changed its cleughs,' added Saxtens' wife—the dying woman being evidently unable to say more, and suffering from that physical exhaustion which often comes to make the sting of death more bearable.

'We must not distract her with questions now,' was Vere's dominant thought. 'It is not right that she should be worried any more about this,' as Mrs. Saxtens rattled on.

'She walked miles when she were not fit—ower ninety, as she be—heerin' as how they was insultin' Mr. Sellwood, by calling 'im base-born, and his name not in the register. And, ses I, "He'd best come, and heer it from her own lips, and then—there's no saying—p'r'aps he'll b'lieve it."'

Vere no longer heard her. She could not spare time just then in considering a matter—of which, after all, she knew little—of how far this signed confession and the certificates in the woman's possession would be important in a court of law. She had fallen on her knees by the bedside of the unhappy creature. The first bewilderment which had confused her at the

unexpectedness of the revelation no longer troubled her for the next few minutes. Her trust in God was too great to allow her to take a despondent view of things, and the custom, to which she had used herself from early years, of looking out for her next duty and trying to perform it, came to her assistance now, and helped to clear her troubled thoughts.

Vere lingered in Mrs. Saxtens' cottage till all was over, and the last sad offices had to be performed for the quiet dead. As she left the house, it was full daylight, and poor Nancy, who had been napping at intervals during the night, limped so slowly homewards as to cause further delay, while her young mistress dared not betray her impatience.

As they passed through the village, groups of men were already tramping from various directions, with scornful laughs on the lips of some of them, and lowering dismay on the faces of others.

'I axed thee a plain question, lad—giv' a plain answer,' said a man, impatiently, to his

mate, as she passed. 'Be it true or not that Mister Sellwood is not i' the place?'

'Here's Joe here wants to know—wher the swell is gone.'

'Californy or Joosalum, for awt I cares,' answered another, with a laugh.

'I tell ye there is a plot against him—anyhow, he's hoff—and there be chaps employed a' ready to scour the country, right and left to find 'im.'

'Oh, it is too dreadful!' thought Vere, as she hurried on. She was beginning to feel the fatigue of the night's watch, and, with lips parched and tongue dry, had a new horror of impending disaster.

'Mind how you tread—the path is slippery—take care,' she said to old Nancy, to cover her own confusion. 'Pray come along,' she whispered, as she took her arm.

And the two glided silently through the now gathering crowd.

Henriette was waiting for them, though it was but nine o'clock.

'Where have you been?' she asked, looking

at her cousin, who was paler than usual, with a harassed expression of face, and covered with dust. And then, not waiting to be answered, she added, 'I suppose you have been helping in the search for Mr. Sellwood? His servants gave the alarm, they say, as early as six o'clock. His bed hasn't been slept in, and they think he has made away with himself. And as to Godfrey, he is enlisting the services of all sorts of people —who are scouring the country, and hunting the copses and ditches?'

'How can I answer so many questions when you pour them out upon me at once—even supposing I knew,' said Vere, hopelessly.

There was something in Henriette's manner which alarmed her—as if the girl were tired of playing the child, and had determined to take a stand of her own which she had never taken before.

'Why didn't you tell me you were engaged to Godfrey Sellwood?' she asked, suddenly. 'Many things might have been different, if you had told me that.'

'I could not tell you what was not true.'

'Do you mean to say you were not engaged to him?'

'I offered myself to him once. He refused me. What more would you have me tell?'

'I suppose it is all a mistake—a queer mistake. Mrs. Austin told me that you two cared for each other. *I* thought it was somebody else, but certainly Godfrey Sellwood used to linger about here in an unaccountable manner.'

'To flirt with *you*,' said Vere, with a smile.

'No, you are wrong there. I soon found out he didn't care for me, and I like him much better as a future husband for you.'

A new light began to dawn upon Vere. Mrs. Austin had probably managed all this, and had plotted to have Henriette at her house that she might practise her usual skilful diplomacy. It was kind of her, but Vere rather resented such interference.

'After all, he had a good reason for not asking anybody to marry him. It would have killed any woman to hear the things which they say of his father.'

'Henriette, I cannot stay and listen to such talk. Who cares about the things? Saying them will not prove them.'

'Then it is worse than I thought,' said the impressionable Henriette. 'Promise me you will not marry him. I should like anything to make a change in my life. But you—you are old-fashioned enough sometimes, with odd ideas about things, but good and noble for all that. Why, I shouldn't——' And Henriette's varying face was now laden with a look of resolution and prophetic woe.

'Nonsense, child—all this excitement is too much for you. You are not going to drop people who were so much to you yesterday, just because there is a little gossiping about them to-day. Let me give you some coffee, and then I can hire a fly to take you back to Mrs. Austin's. She will amuse you better than I can. I am terribly tired.'

An hour afterwards Vere was alone, and the telegram which she had expected was put into her hand. The message was explicit enough, and even in the midst of her sorrow she felt a

little triumphant to think that young Mitchell had not been taught at the night-school, which she herself had started, for nothing. The telegram stated that he had followed Mr. S. to Liverpool, and found that he had taken passage in a ship which did not sail till that night for America.

After this she dressed herself neatly, taking the precaution to carry warm wraps on her arms and to hide her face in a thick gauze veil.

In a bed-room above, old Nancy was sleeping quietly, and Vere trod so softly that she could not be disturbed. In the kitchen below another servant—a middle-aged woman who had often been assisted by her young mistress in the preparation of difficult dishes during Sir Ralph's invalidism—was busy preparing the usual middle-day meal. She was too well used to Miss Rashleigh's superintendence of all that concerned the welfare of the household to be startled when the latter opened the door. But she stared a little when Vere said, with pallid face and decided manner,

'Jane, a relation of mine is in distress—per-

haps in danger of his life. I have made up my mind to go at once to Liverpool to look after him. It will not do for me to go alone, but I have counted on your readiness to go with me. We shall probably return again to-morrow. Can you oblige me by getting ready at once ?'

'Law, yes, miss,' said the somewhat disconcerted Jane. 'I've never been so far, as I knows of, in my life-time—but if so be as you must go yerself—why, it stands to razon as yer can't go alone.'

Vere, who was accustomed to being obeyed, had won the woman's heart by the constant and benevolent interest which she took in the happiness of her servants. And yet it was evident that Jane got ready unwillingly. She was one of the people who are suspicious of everything new, and who believe that old arrangements are in no need of reformation.

She was sufficiently slow in preparing for the journey to leave time for her mistress to write letters which she had determined to write.

The first was to her cousin Henriette.

'Do not think it strange if I did not tell you this morning. I shall probably be back again before you have time to miss me. I was afraid you would be nervous about me, or that you would argue and try to deter me from my purpose. I find that duty *compels* me to go at once to Liverpool. Prepare yourself for a piece of very startling news. I have every reason to believe that your father's and my father's elder brother is still living, and that he has been grievously wronged all his lifetime. If the information which I have is correct, he is the man who has passed by the name of Reuben Sellwood. It is wonderful to me to think how he has conquered circumstances, considering that he never benefited by the education which all the rest of us received, and which, as a wise man used to say, begins from the day that "the infant is something more than a mere animated vegetable." There is a craze about heredity in the present day, but I think we have no reason to be ashamed of our uncle——'

Here Vere waited, balancing her pen in her hand.

She had been intending to add, 'remembering that the characteristics of the vegetable are the same, though its development may be altered.' But there was no occasion to discuss this opinion with Henriette, who could certainly not in the least understand her. It was better to add,

'His vulgarity has been on the surface; I have never considered him to be really vulgar at heart, and, as to the things they say about him, I am certain that they are not true. Yet he is the victim of a vile conspiracy, and, if I do not seek him out and try to help him, it may be too late. I have a feeling that my grandfather and your father would urge me to do so; that conviction is so strong that I dare not disobey it. There is no occasion to confide in Mrs. Austin—yet. She knows the world better than I do, and it will be time enough for her to advise me as to what is best to be done when I can tell her the whole story more correctly.'

To Godfrey she wrote,

'Your father is at Liverpool. He is hoping to preserve a disguise which he has assumed with the intention of protecting himself against

men who have plotted to ruin him. I know now that he is my uncle, and that there should be really no necessity for constraint between us. As soon as I can I will put an end to the mystery, which I hope to do with your help. I seem to have known it more or less for years, though I could never speak to anyone about it. There was a sort of likeness to my father and grandfather, more in complexion than in feature, which at times seemed inexplicable to me, especially of late years when he became by degrees gentler in speech, more quiet in his manner, and more tender in his treatment of women.

'He told me once that I had done him good, and that he was proud of my devotion to him. Need I say that I also am proud and thankful to him for his goodness to me? I can tell you no more now than that he is labouring under a cruelly unjust accusation, that he is determined to disprove it, and that he is hoping to meet men in the States who may bring evidence to do so. I should like to tell him the truth before he starts.'

Her pen hesitated here. Was it necessary for her to say more of her future intentions? If there was no need for constraint with Godfrey's father, there was reason for keeping Godfrey himself at a distance. Yet she wished to bring father and son together, and added, after short reflection,

'I cannot let my poor uncle be tempted to anything desperate. The ship will not wait while we are deliberating, and it is my desire, at least, to get a few words with him to soothe and quiet him, should no one else come to his assistance. But you surely will not let him sail alone. It is my conviction that he needs some one with him, to keep him from the determination to elude us all, or even from suicidal tendencies. I can tell you no more now than that he has been cruelly treated.'

CHAPTER IX.

ALTHOUGH the two women started by an early train, it was late in the afternoon before they reached their destination, and the evening was already drawing in before they took the final step, after obtaining the necessary leave, of going on board the *Berkeley Castle*. The lateness of the hour was in itself unfortunate for Vere's purpose, but it was still more unfortunate that she was possessed of no clue which would have helped her to identify her uncle. She had been prepared for the fact that he had assumed a disguise—the boy had told her so much. But she had forgotten that he would probably change his name, and had not guessed that he would embark as a steerage passenger.

In the confusion and bustle on board the ship, with sorrowful leave-takings in the deepening twilight, it was not likely that Vere's perplexity would attract much attention. Rough sailors pushed past her, carrying bales and boxes, and those whom she questioned turned away their eyes impatiently, after the truth had once been ascertained that there was no Mr. Sellwood among the passengers.

Jenny was worse than useless. The journey had already unhinged her, and now the sight of the dark masses of seething water, which intervened between herself and the glimmering lamps that had just been lit on shore—with the ghostly look of the tall masts of the shadowy vessel, and the dread of becoming entangled in the ropes which seemed to be like live things to catch people's feet—increased her bewilderment and dismay.

On the deck people and things had become difficult to distinguish. The tragedies which were being enacted were veiled by the merciful dusk. Yet the hand-clasps, the tearful farewells, and the look of desolation on some of the faces as

they tore themselves away from the 'old familiar scenes' and endeavoured to say a calm good-bye to friends whom they might never meet again on earth, were all-engrossing to those who took part in them. None of the crew had a thought to give to the affairs of disconsolate strangers. Vere and her companion remained unnoticed, with no one to warn them that they incurred a risk of being forgotten, as Miss Rashleigh suggested at last to her maid that it would be better to make some inquiry as to the names of those in the cabins to which a few of the passengers had already retired for rest.

A bell rang as they were creeping back again, disappointed, up the companion ladder. But though Vere quickened her footsteps, saying, 'I suppose we must give it up—it is useless to search for him any more,' she had never thought it possible that the boatmen—to whom she had given explicit directions, and who were now hurrying the strangers with scant courtesy into the boats—would think of pushing off without her. And Jenny, whose nervousness had

increased, and whose fears of being separated from her young mistress were now added to her renewed horror of being entangled in the ropes or struck by the boxes, proved to be a greater hindrance than ever to all rapid movement.

'If Mr. Godfrey had bin 'eer—it might ha' bin different,' muttered the woman, discontentedly, as she found herself wedged for a moment in the crowd, close to another woman, with a baby, which she was afraid of hurting.

'Yes, if we had had a gentleman it would have been better,' admitted Vere, who was unable to confide to a servant that she herself was sore at heart on account of young Mr. Sellwood's unaccountable tardiness in obeying the summons of her telegram, and feeling at the same time how very much she preferred not having been obliged to travel by the same train with him. She had been aware of this duality in her mind concerning him in past days, and reproached herself for her old inconsistency of feeling.

'If he had come by the next train, as I thought he would, I should have been able to

tell him at once that we have lost the clue. But, if he had meant to come, he ought to have been here by this time—as it is, he will just miss; and who can tell whether my worst fears may not be realised?' she thought to herself, sadly.

Just at that moment a lantern, which was held by one of the ship's crew, flashed upon the faces of the people who were near her, and she no longer heard the voices calling or attended to the movements of the crowd. Jane—who was watching her mistress closely, with the increasing and not unfounded fear of being separated from her—could not tell why Miss Rashleigh held unaccountably back, while others pushed forward. There was nothing startling to the maid in the appearance of an old, close-shaven man, wearing a coarse serge suit, and with a sealskin cap pushed so closely over his brows as almost to hide his eyes. But Vere was saying to herself,

'If I had not heard the story of his birth before, I *must* have known him by the likeness now. Surely he must see it himself when he

looks in the glass—the likeness of the lines of the mouth and chin to my uncle Ralph—only *his* mouth was weaker, and—to the pictures of my father.'

She tried to reach the man who seemed to wish to elude her, uttering a sudden exclamation as she tore the veil from her face. But as she did so he disappeared. Could it be possible that Reuben Sellwood had hidden himself from her intentionally; that he did not wish to be followed even by his son; that he intended to preserve his disguise and perhaps to deny his identity? Had she allowed her impulses to mislead her in trying to help him in his difficulty, and in supposing that circumstances were altered because he was so closely related to her?

Before Vere had time to answer these questions which crowded into her mind, a new sort of fright assailed her. The decks were suddenly clearer. There was no longer the sound of the bell. Could it be possible that the boats which had been a few minutes before alongside were already full, and had started without her? She strained her eyes to see over the intervening

space of water, which had rapidly risen during the last quarter of an hour, and which had been for some time thronged with small boats. At the same moment a new horror that the ship was moving came upon her confusedly, and made her cry to one of the men who seemed most likely to give assistance,

'Stop the boat—stop it—we shall be left behind.'

'Lor' miss,' was the answer, 'there's no more boats going now. They've a'ready weighed anchor.'

'What could I have been thinking of?' cried Vere, in self-reproach. 'Surely it is not too late—they will send another boat.'

The men only shook their heads, while Jane, in whom the seeds of rebellion had been developing for some time, and who would have needed some much slighter provocation to make her lose the little self-control which remained to her, rushed wildly to the ship's side, flourishing first of all her pocket-handkerchief, and then her shawl. Finally—discovering that all her efforts and screams for assistance were of no avail—

she collapsed in a hysterical fit, to the amusement of some of the sailors, and the pitying perplexity of a few of the passengers.

Meanwhile the captain, whom Vere had sought, remained inflexible to all entreaty. The wind was high, and as the ship sailed majestically out of the harbour the white surf could be seen in the 'glimpses of the moon,' and Vere could understand the difficulty there would have been in putting back. There were some humiliations for her to bear—one of the worst being the way in which Jane took the misadventure. But even the fussy lamentations of the latter were not without their advantages, as these were the means of attracting the attention of sympathetic people. One of the kindest among the women proffered assistance. She was a widow with several children journeying to the States, and she pressed on Miss Rashleigh's acceptance a berth in her cabin. Others made no difficulty in providing for the still sobbing Jane, or in offering changes of clothing till the vessel should stop at some port.

''Tain't as large as most o' the reg'lar passen-

ger-ships,' explained one of the more confidential of the crew; 'there ain't much accommodation, and capen, he's already been put about by that eer boat which put off from the 'arbour when the ship was a'ready starting.'

'Ay, a foolhardy genl'man—must have paid heavy fees to the boatmen; they rowed with a will to catch the steamer, and he up the side o' the ship, and in in a jiffey, while the bell was a-ringing, t'other folks going off, and the captain swearing that he'd take no one else in.'

'Time and tide wait for no one,' commented the first speaker, with a shake of the head, as he looked at Miss Rashleigh; and, from the further remarks which were made, Vere had no difficulty in gathering that Godfrey Sellwood must have arrived, after all, just at the time when she herself had been absent from the deck, and that he was probably now doing his utmost to search for his father.

Her unwillingness to inflict her own trouble upon him made her more ready to accept the offer of the lady, who seemed really to require assistance with her children. But on the fol-

lowing morning, as she stood looking a little hopelessly at the expanse of rushing and receding waves, she was startled by the sound of Godfrey's voice. There seemed to be a sort of gladness in it which he was unable to conceal, as—having heard some of the other passengers making themselves merry at the accident which had befallen two unprotected females—he had hastened to try to make her see the bright side of the apparent disaster.

'You know you used to say you would like a sea-voyage, and that you wished to see America. I am sure you will go with us all the way,' he said, as they talked together of their plans, and of what was best to be done in the case of Reuben continuing to avoid his son.

'I stayed at Torringmoor till the middle of the day to save appearances. By that time we could tell pretty well which way the poll was going, matters, of course, being entirely altered when my father's name was withdrawn from the contest.'

'That in itself was a bitter disappointment to him.'

Godfrey answered by explaining his own theory that the rapid succession of untoward events had been too much for his father's brain, and that if Reuben was suffering, as he feared he might be, from some transient affection of the nervous system, it would be best to humour him in maintaining his disguise, winning his confidence by degrees, and then telling him Vere's story.

In accordance with this plan, the two tried to avoid the appearance of seeming to watch the fugitive, and indeed kept aloof to a certain extent from each other.

The fact that Reuben was said to be suffering from headache, and seldom showed himself till the darkness came on, even on the steerage part of the deck, seemed to favour Godfrey's hypothesis that his father was ill, or, at least, that he had good reasons for wishing to preserve his privacy. So that, with the exception of a sympathetic glance at the beardless face—which was at first a little difficult to recognise, with the hair shaven off so that it was easy to see in the lines of the chin and mouth, as well

as in those of the somewhat high-bridged nose, the likeness which Vere's quick eye had detected—the son passed him in respectful silence. He had sent letters to his father assuring him of his deference to his wishes, and of his readiness to observe the line of conduct indicated by him; but as yet he had received no answer.

So days passed, and the *Berkeley Castle* ploughed its way over the waves on its voyage to America. The passage had been so far a rough one, and several of the ladies had been confined to their cabins since the shores of England had receded from view. But a few, who seemed to rejoice in the freshness of the wind and a sight of the big waves, remained continually on deck. Among them was Vere, who laughed at herself in the character of an interloper, and who had written to Mrs. Austin an amusing account of her somewhat awkward adventure. She had managed to make friends with most of the mothers who had children on board, and occupied herself with taking care of the little ones when most of the mothers were incapacitated.

After a time the wind seemed somewhat to abate. The sea was dark and oily, with glimmers here and there of phosphorescent light. The ship still pitched a little, but the waves were shorter, and no longer broke in coils of spray which were shattered by the wind, whilst as the evenings drew on the sky was thick with stars.

'It is a good thing to be able to talk a little without roaring as if through a speaking-trumpet,' said Godfrey's voice one evening.

'I have been blaming myself for sending you that telegram. Why did you attempt to reach the ship, after the signal had been given her to start, and when the night was so dark? I have heard the people here say it was at the risk of your life,' answered Vere, remorsefully.

'I assure you there was no danger in it. And if there had been could I have done less? You cannot conceive the agony I suffered when I knew that *you* were exposing yourself for my father's sake, and that I had been left at home

like a milksop doing nothing. The thing was impossible.'

She was silent. There had been moments when she was vexed with herself for having come on this errand of mercy at all. Would she not have done the same for any of her fellow-creatures who were in trouble or in danger, but did not Godfrey hint plainly that he had thought a good deal not only of his father but of *her* being in the ship? He was evidently pleased that she had not returned, and was it not possible that he attributed the motive to her which would probably be attributed by the world in general, and against which she had already been attempting to guard herself by writing a letter to Henriette as well as that to Mrs. Austin which she intended to post on the first occasion, and in which she entreated her cousin to tell the whole truth at Torringmoor, as nothing was so conducive to ill-natured gossip as telling half-truths which could be misconstrued. Everything about the supposed Reuben Sellwood's real parentage, and Godfrey's claim without any purchase to the

property, must come to the surface now—the sooner the better. Yet Vere reproached herself for thinking so continually of what was best for Godfrey, when she could not be sure that he thought about her. The juxtaposition into which they were now sometimes thrown made it difficult for her to exclude him from her mind.

'You try to keep me at arm's length, as my poor father keeps us both. I know that I have no longer right to come near you, now that his honour and mine may be irreparably stained.'

'Don't say that,' she cried a little impetuously. 'Whatever your father may have done, it cannot affect you.'

'The world thinks differently.'

'Never mind the world. Besides, it is my opinion you may be proud of your father. He is scared at present, as if some terrific calamity were really overhanging him, and he is determined to avert it. If his education had always been like yours, and he understood more about these things, he would treat these villains

with the disdain with which they ought to be treated.'

'*You* may read something which I cannot unravel,' he said, a little sadly, 'shallow people may misjudge him, but you were never shallow.'

Had he yielded to his feelings he would have liked to have taken her hand in his tender clasp, and blessed her for her goodness to his unhappy father. He could only thank her through the unsympathetic vehicle of the eyes.

'There is nothing so wrong as you think,' she said, presently. 'I wish I could help you. You have already heard the woman Elspeth's story and I have given you the proofs. The neighbours are ready to bear witness to the fact that she was your father's nurse.'

'The story doesn't so very much matter, but it wants the connecting links, and outsiders, you know, may discredit it on account of the advanced age of the witness. When women are over ninety and the memory is weak——'

He did not finish the sentence, and she made no direct reply. Something held her back and made it impossible.

'To tell the truth, I should not care at all about proving it. I have so used myself to the idea of belonging to the people—and—there is something about which I care so very much more that all other things dwindle into insignificance beside it.'

He stopped, but she did not help him. If she cared for *him* at all, if her indifferent manner concealed a secret feeling, he could have no suspicion of it. Yet it is strange what fancies get into one's head when one is heart-sick. And as his watchful, anxious eyes were fixed on her, keen with the instinct of love, he saw, faint as the light was, her face pale and her eyes wet with some new emotion.

'Did you not guess that one of the reasons why I came home again was because of you?' he cried, with sudden passion in his voice. 'Why should we prevaricate with each other? You may not want any new interests—you may

take life as it is—and be content with all the kind acts which you perform for others. But I? My heart has cried out to you in the exile of all these years.'

'Don't speak of that,' she said, piteously. 'I don't know quite what you mean. If you were in exile, it was I who was to blame for it. I ask your pardon. I did what I thought was my duty then. I suppose we have most of us done what is wrong in our lifetime, and I ought not to have arrogated to myself the right of——'

She was going to add, 'Of interfering—even though I felt that I should lower myself by consenting to have anything to do with such a compact.'

But it did not seem possible to refer to the past mistake, especially with the remembrance that the man who had planned it was at this time broken down himself, and that he had taken refuge in flight rather than face a scandal.

'It was not your fault—it was only your misfortune—don't trouble over it any more,' God-

frey entreated. For at that moment the fear of his father's guilt seemed to be lowering on him from the sky, and the stains on his horizon made him afraid to look at the pure, clear stars which gazed down on him like severe eyes, and made the remembrance of that time of penance in London seem comparatively light.

'I do not know why you talk of such things now,' she said, with her old sadness stealing over her. 'You had a great deal to go through then—and now you have this mystery to solve about your father's birth—and the trouble about his losing that election—you seem to forget about all these minor things, though you attach too much importance to the scandal they raised about him. I don't know, after all, what you really care for.'

'I care for nothing but you,' he said, in a voice she never forgot, and which left her no more room for doubt. She started at the sound of it. Her first impulse was to quicken her pace to the other side of the ship where some of the passengers were walking. Her next to stand still and rally her dignity. The announcement was sur-

prising for a variety of reasons, and she could not keep the sarcasm out of her voice, as she said, with an attempt at speaking lightly,

'How long have you found that out?'

'Ever since you sent me from you. It was *my* fault to go on hoping, though you gave me no hope.'

'You have been very silent.'

'My silence was deliberate. I wished to know if you had remained unchanged. I had based such hopes upon——'

'Don't hope at all,' she answered, thinking of Henriette, so that the answer was given proudly, with her eyebrows drawn together.

He bowed and made way for her as she walked quickly away from him towards the cabin.

Mute and unappealing he sat, half stunned and blinded, his reason refusing to take-in the reality of her decision.

'I never dreamt of love, but for one woman, and she has cast me off,' he said to himself, in a slow, uncertain way, which made him notice, as in a dream, the change in the weather.

The sea, which had been heavy for days, was

becoming more and more still. The stars were now completely veiled in a canopy of cloud, and a dense, impenetrable fog, making it difficult to see eight or ten yards ahead, was enveloping even the ship's company in a darkness which might be felt.

'I don't like the look of the weather,' the captain observed to some one, unconscious of a listener. It was impossible for Godfrey to see that the other man was his father, but he recognised the voice in a conversation which followed, and in which Reuben, as usual, showed his practical foresight.

'If he is in trouble, I have a right to share it with him,' he thought, with a half-formed intention of getting up from the seat on which he had hidden himself, and endeavouring, under cover of this darkness, to force some explanation from the father who eluded him.

Meanwhile, in the cabin—which she shared with the lady who was going out to the States to rejoin her husband—Vere was endeavouring, as usual, to assist with the children.

'There are plenty of other things for a wo-

man to do besides marrying. I have a perfect right to decide on never marrying, if it suits me. Of course I can never marry any other man but Godfrey. But Henriette fancies him, though she pretends that she does not,' she was thinking to herself, as she attempted to calm the peevish infant, whose mother—but just recovered from the agonies of sea-sickness, and delighting in the change of weather—was sitting up for the first time, looking rather helpless.

Surely it was a lapse from her usual consistency for her to think for a moment of veering from the plan which, in her strict sense of duty, she had marked out for herself. And yet, to see a strong man in such evident pain had been agonizing to her. It was all most perplexing, the more so that a voice within seemed to say to her,

'Beware, if you deaden human love; the divine may no longer be able to exist.'

It was perhaps a morbid fancy, but she began to feel as if she had treated Godfrey badly. She had reasoned perhaps from false premises.

Henriette might have flirted with him. It was characteristic of that little school-girl to be very willing, like another Miranda, to open her heart, in simplicity, to the first Ferdinand that came. But if the flirting had been on one side, after all, could Vere do better than commit herself to the loyalty of the man who had loved her so long and faithfully?

When the baby slept at last, she lay down in her berth, but not to sleep. Her thoughts were occupied with anxiety as to what was best to be done about Reuben. For, though she possessed much of that spiritual alchemy by which a heart that is accustomed to rest on God can transmute even its own troubles into joy, the troubles of others pressed hardly on her.

'I cannot force him to speak to me against his will. That would be unwomanly,' she thought, a little sadly. 'His is a mind to hold on tightly to anything which he has undertaken.'

She had not the faintest conception of what Godfrey could mean by hinting that his father

would not be proud to have it proved that his had ever been the title by right, and that he had been the elder and legitimate son of her grandfather—and another George Rashleigh. That some other sad story was weighing on his mind, not associated with this mystery of Reuben's birth—a story which he would willingly let sleep, and the recollection of which sometimes would cleave its way like a lightning flash to his poor heart—was suddenly remembered by her, and for the first time she saw that she had possibly been guilty of imprudence, if not of self-will, in undertaking to help the man whom she supposed to be her uncle.

She who thought of personal human life as of the development of the soul, and who believed in dormant forces for purification, leading to strenuous efforts after good—such as she hoped had been lately roused in Reuben's nature—thought very tenderly of him, making excuses for his new and shamefaced desire to keep out of notice, as she lay musing in her wakefulness. That a character should be

stirred to its depths, the real ore sifted and discovered in the hope of final deliverance from evil, was, according to her way of thinking, one of the best things which could happen, by whatever means, in the moral evolution of a human being.

'After all, he cannot hold out long,' she reflected. 'He will be sure, sooner or later, to speak to Godfrey.'

She had always felt that the love which this rough man had for his son, however it might have been warped for the gratification of his own selfish desires, was still love, and as such ennobling.

'He loves Godfrey still—he will not avoid him long—it is only a shame-faced pride, and a sort of stunned feeling which makes him keep out of his way now,' she reflected further. 'I do not believe in that theory about the weakening of the brain. At any rate, Godfrey's father seems to have made friends with the captain—perhaps because it was not possible for him to avoid *him* without exciting notice.'

Although she did not know it, the mutual

reserve which had so often been unfortunately kept up between the father and the son was being conquered that very night, when in close converse together Reuben and Godfrey were helping the captain to keep a careful look-out on deck. There seemed to be no need to apprehend danger, for Captain Herrick, who appeared to be fully equal to the emergency, had decided that under the present circumstances it would be better not to attempt to make headway, but to reduce speed from eleven knots to a pace which was slow. There seemed to be little for any who were willing to help to do. For Mr. Herrick and his second officer were themselves on the bridge, and the pilot in charge was also looking out. Vere, who was lying sleepless below, wondered at the sound of bells which from time to time resounded in the darkness, blended with other sounds which she did not know to be fog-horns. Then suddenly a low rumbling, as of a vessel approaching, was heard. And peeping through the port-hole, which was close to her sleeping-berth, she saw something dark looming out of the fog, moving

quickly through the water. She lay down again in an instant, and then a tremendous shock, upsetting everything in the cabin, and followed by a splashing of water, was followed by a cry from the terrified mother—something like she had fancied a woman's cry might be if she were shot through the heart. It was re-echoed as soon as uttered by wails of distress, and other cries as piteous, from the other and larger cabin, and again that terrible rushing of water.

Vere was up in a moment, seizing two of the children. Fortunately the desire to minister to these little ones, whose mother was often so unable to help them, had caused her to form the habit of being provided with her dressing-gown. She wrapped herself in it now.

The lower part of the cabin was already wet with the water.

'Courage! we are in God's hands. Take the baby and follow me,' she said, almost sternly, to the mother, whose sense of the present danger seemed to be numbing her faculties.

At the same time she heard Godfrey's voice. He cried,

'Is it all right below? Have you sprung a leak?' helping her and her terror-stricken fellow-passenger with a coolness of decision which left no time for further questioning.

The scene on deck was one of terrible confusion. Some of the lady passengers who had been aroused from sleep, with no time to put on warmer clothing, were rushing backwards and forwards wildly imploring help, whilst others retained more of their presence of mind, and some of the more active of the men—Reuben's figure conspicuous in the emergency—were endeavouring to marshal them into appointed places. Vere did not require to be told that there had been a tremendous collision, and that the bow of a formidable steamer, which was still looming through the darkness, had pierced the side of the '*Berkeley Castle*,' which had already heeled half over, laying her bulwark and port close down to the water. Nor did it seem as if the commander of the other steamer would be able to render much assistance,

for the ship had rebounded from the violence of the shock, and could be but faintly seen through the fog. Lifebelts and other appliances were being served out—the boats swung on the davitts, and every preparation made for getting them lowered with safety.

Meanwhile the emergency was more critical than had at first been expected, The vessel sank lower in the water, and Godfrey—who by Vere's request had put the frightened mother and her little ones, with Jane and others of the passengers and crew, into the first boat which was pushed off—turned in anxiety to her.

The fog was by this time beginning to lift, and the east was touched with the splendour of the rising sun, revealing the full horror of the situation. Some of the crew had already climbed the rigging and, with faces ghastly in their pallor, were calmly awaiting the result, while two of the officers with others of the crew were putting on their life-belts, and preparing to take to the water.

Meanwhile the purser and the steward, with some of the passengers to help him, among

whom the Sellwoods were conspicuous, had been assisting most of the women into other boats, one of which was whirled away in the darkness, and one was in considerable danger of being capsized as it was crowded by men who jumped into it without orders.

The last boat was now ready to be lowered. Godfrey looked at Vere who had held back till now, whilst others were pushing forward, but who was now deadly pale with her lips blue and trembling, though she tried to take the most cheerful view of the situation.

'There is not a minute to lose,' he said, in a choking voice; 'they helped your maid down the ladder, but now you must jump to save your life.'

'Where is your father?' she asked, looking round.

'I will see to my father afterwards. Thank Heaven he is a good swimmer. I saw him a few minutes ago, more active than anyone in assisting the helpless. There is no one who knows better how to meet these emergencies, for no one has weathered more dangers than he

has in his past life. You will do him no good if you stay to search for him, and 'it may be too late to save yourself,' he answered, with the huskiness of voice which grated on her ear.

'I came to take care of him,' she repeated, a little obstinately, straining her brave eyes for Reuben. 'God who has helped me hitherto will spare us. I am not afraid.'

'Quickly now—there is no time to be lost—you must do as I tell you,' he cried, almost passionately, as, grasping her, he lifted her off her feet. 'Steady there, lads, the lady first,' he called, as he lifted her, and the men standing at the bow of the boat caught her as, yielding to his instructions, she let herself fall from his arms into those outstretched to receive her.

He had intended to wait, and make another effort to save his father. But at that moment a whiff of wind caught the sinking ship, and hastened its fate. And a little exclamation of pain from Vere, who had grazed her side in her descent against one of the timbers of the sinking vessel, made further calculation impossible. He flung himself to her assistance and helped

to push off the boat, which was not more than two lengths from the steamer when the ship sank suddenly by the stern and disappeared.

A voice sang out 'Good-bye' as the vessel went down. It was the voice of Reuben, who was clinging to some of the lower part of the rigging. A terrible dread shot through Godfrey's heart. But a few minutes before. when he had seen his father coolly giving orders to some of the more bewildered of the passengers, he had counted on his presence of mind to do the best for himself. Now, as he waved his hand, and said 'good-bye,' a sick fear occurred to him that Reuben—in his weariness of life, his unwillingness to face the future, and his aching feeling of the irksomeness of it all—might be glad to escape not only to America, but out of the difficulties of life altogether.

The other occupants of the boat thought that Godfrey was beside himself as—shouting in answer, 'It is *not* good-bye. Hold on till I come to help you,'—he flung himself into the water just after the ship had gone down.

Amongst all the thrilling incidents of that dreadful morning there was none more pathetic than the story of the son who had risked his life to save his father. When the passengers in the boats had been received into the other steamer, and when successful efforts had been made to pick up others of the crew—who had been found floating about, having seized hold of any wreckage or spar which was at hand—the two men were descried clinging to the boat which was bottom upwards, and which had been overturned in the hasty efforts made to load it. It then appeared that the older man's power of swimming had deserted him. He had been struck by some portion of the rigging, and, had not Godfrey managed to support him in the water till the boat was reached, he must inevitably have gone down with the few who had been lost.

'Thank God,' said Godfrey, on the following day, when he broke the news to Vere, who—in common with the other women who had been rescued from the wreck—had experienced the greatest kindness from the captain and

crew of the vessel which had been the cause of the disaster. 'Thank God that we shall be able to brighten the remaining years of his life. He was not selfish or ignoble, and his has been a troubled life—*how* troubled we can scarcely know,' he added, unconscious of his somewhat curious use of the 'we,' and speaking with deep emotion, as he looked involuntarily up to the sky, blue and clear after the fog of the preceding day.

Vere was reclining upon a basket-chair on deck, wrapt in the warm coverings which had been lent to her. Her mind was a little confused from all that she had gone through, but, as her eyes followed the direction of his, she drew a long, sobbing breath.

Neither spoke of the thoughts present to the minds of both—thoughts of the unclothed spirits which had been in their company but a few hours before, and were now—*where?* Far above and beyond them, millions of miles away, beyond the sun and beyond the stars? A thrill, very strange and solemn, seemed to pass over the woman's nerves as she remembered the one

little child among those dead, who had kissed her the day before, and who had solved the great riddle, and knew infinitely more now than the wisest men on earth could know of that change.

'Are you thinking about *that*, too?' she asked, drawing another deep breath, but conscious at the same moment, from the expression of Godfrey's face, of some newly-discovered point of sympathy which made speech unnecessary.

'About what?' he faltered, knowing that he answered stupidly.

'About something which one can feel, but cannot articulate. Perhaps it belongs to the other language which we have not yet learnt. But how it comforts one to believe in a merciful Father, and to feel sure that Love overrules all!'

He nodded—and though neither of them said that, in the clear light of Eternity, they might one day find that what men call death may be only that fuller life which He 'who loved us into life' came to give his people 'more abun-

dantly,'—neither thought it necessary to express the sentiment. There are moments too solemn for human talk.

'The captain—he was kind to me?' asked the girl, very softly.

'His last thought was for others. He died doing his duty.'

'A little sooner than ourselves. I often wonder what it must be to be beginning to learn that new tongue and really to *see*,' she said, after a pause—the eyes which had been blinded by a gush of tears shining now with a soft light.

'I think I ought to tell you,' she added, turning again, after a few minutes, to Godfrey, 'that some one said you were a splendid fellow, and ought to have a public testimonial.'

'My father did more than I did,' he answered, gravely, but his voice was not quite steady.

And it was then that she noticed an indefinable something in his manner, which made her understand that he had more to break to her; and the happy, trustful light—which, as she sat with folded hands during that interval of silence,

had seemed to grow brighter and brighter, as if it would irradiate her face—suddenly went out.

'Your father?' she exclaimed, interrogatively, with still that determination to master her overstrung nerves which made her press her hands tightly together.

'Did they not tell you? His spine has been seriously injured. He will never go to America. I shall have to go for him.'

'Is there—anything—I can—do?' she asked, after another pause, with the old impulse strong upon her which had ever made her so ready to cope with emergencies, so full of immediate courage and enterprise. 'Did he send me—any—message?'

All that Godfrey had studied to say in preparation for such a question, which she would probably put, went clean out of his mind at the critical moment. He had been driven into a corner, and could only answer simply,

'He said that the dearest wish of his heart was to see us—as soon as possible—man and wife. Need I repeat what I told you the other

night—that I always have loved you, and always shall, and that I never shall cease caring for you, and never cared in that way for anyone else? And then, till I can prove his right to the title, and communicate with friends in the States—who, it seems, can do much to clear up this scandal, knowing what liars and blackguards these ruffians are—you—you would be be able to take care of my father—like a daughter.'

She was silent, and he continued:

'Ah, I could send to Mrs. Morton to help you, but I see it is asking too much. I did not speak out at the right time, because I was led to imagine that you had promised to marry my friend. And, now that the delusion has been dispelled, most women would consider that I had offered them an affront in asking them to marry a man who is somehow under a cloud. Only that I thought you were different from most women, and that the anguish of uncertainty compelled me to speak out——'

'Don't you judge a little hastily about *most* women?' she interrupted, in that direct way in

which her simple nature let all her true impulses sway her. 'And I—I who owe you some reparation—do you think anything could give me greater pleasure than to nurse your father?'

THE END.

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